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BUDDHĀNUSMṚTI BETWEEN WORSHIP AND MEDITATION: EARLY CURRENTS OF THE CHINESE *EKOTTARIKA-ĀGAMA*

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Abstract

Certain forms of devotion to the Buddha existed at the beginnings of Buddhism, centuries before the Common Era, and others subsist till the present day. In tune with the current research on the ideational history of Buddhist devotion and meditation, this paper presents, among other arguments related to Buddha commemoration, recollection and concentration, the results of the first in-depth investigation from the standpoint of the numerical collection from Far East Asia: the Chinese *Zengyi ahan jing*. This is the only complete extant translation of a lost Indian *Ekottarika-āgama*.¹ The study provides a choice of quotes from ancient sources relevant for the portrayal of devotional ideational currents, an overview of the early currents of Buddha invocation, especially *namo buddhāya* (honour to the Buddha)² and *buddhānusmṛti* (commemoration of the Buddha)³ as found in the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* translation, a discussion on ‘Buddha commemoration *samādhi* sūtras’, an investigation of further literary generic sub-categories belonging to the later canonical strata that attest ‘meditations dedicated to the / a Buddha’. It examines the soteriological functions of devotional practices by furnishing new perspectives from ancient primary sources.

1 The *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經), 1924–1929, is the Chinese Buddhist Canon edition most commonly used in the field of Buddhist studies. The *Zengyi ahan jing* (增壹阿含經) has 51 scrolls and 280 pages (T2, no. 125, p. 549a–830b). Although its Chinese title ends with *sūtra* / *jing* (經), it is not a *sūtra*, but a collection of *sūtras*. The Chinese Canon further contains twenty-three *sūtras*, extracts of *Ekottarika-āgama*, translated into Chinese by various translators of different epochs (T2, no. 126–148). Cf. Paul HARRISON, 1997, for no. 131 and 140. The Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* is nominally equivalent to the Pāli *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, but differs largely from it in substance.

2 *Nanwu fo* (南無佛).

3 Remembrance, commemoration, recollection, or contemplation of the Buddha: *Nian fo* (念佛).

Part I: Buddha commemoration in context

1. *A note on categorical distinctions in the study of Buddha commemoration*

1.1. First distinction: the support material

Buddhānusmṛti stands for remembrance, commemoration, recollection or mental contemplation of the Buddha. It is a practice mentioned and described in dozens, if not hundreds, of Buddhist texts. The present study deals with written material, especially, but not only, from the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*. To commemorate the Buddha with the help of an image or a statue falls within the range of mental activity, but further connects to the visual faculty as it uses material for visual support. This aspect of devotion has been discussed in previous studies, for instance with reference to the Theravada tradition,⁴ and is, in accordance with the content matter of the present study, only treated *in situ*, where it appears in connection with *buddhānusmṛti*.

1.2. Second distinction: the text genre and sectarian affiliation

The written material that is taken into account for the present study can be classified according to its school affiliation when known and into textual genres: ancient primary sources (for example a Sanskrit *sūtra* or a *sutta* from the Pāli Canon), ancient translated primary sources (such as the *sūtras* of the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*), ancient secondary sources (for example the *Visuddhimagga*), ancient translated secondary sources (for example the Chinese translation of the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Commentary*), ancient non-Indian secondary sources (for example the *Chu san zang ji ji*),⁵ etc.

1.3. Third distinction: the textual context

The analysis includes data on the textual context of the quoted passages in order to extend the range of examples regarding textual interrelationship and classification.

4 For a brief outline see CROSBY, 2005: 251–253.

5 The *Chu san zang ji ji* (出三藏記集), T55, no. 2145, the oldest extant Chinese Buddhist catalogue from the beginning of the sixth century.

1.4. Fourth distinction: the content matter

What is it that is being commemorated: qualities, titles or marks of the Buddha? The Buddhist tradition(s) have handed down (at least) three different types of enumerations of the attributes of a Buddha: (1) the qualities of a / the Buddha(s), (2) the Buddha's titles / epithets, and (3) the Buddha's (physical) marks.⁶ From the point of view of Buddha commemoration, the last category has no relevance and will not be discussed any further. And the first category is so vast and varies so much depending on text genre that it lies outside the scope of the present study to make a general overview of it. Buddha qualities are discussed within the frame of their explicit relation to Buddha commemoration. What is more, the epithets fully bear on the Buddha's qualities and often appear in connection with Buddha commemoration, in earlier as well as in later scriptures. They also found their way into the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* and will be discussed below.

1.5. Fifth distinction: the purpose(s)

Previous studies rightly distinguish between (1) soteriological scopes, (2) emulating aspirations, and (3) meditation purposes, as the three main factors. Besides spiritual salvation or rebirth in heaven, the first category also includes protection from danger or lust, appeasement of fear as well as purification. The present paper deals with all these issues, except with purification.⁷

2. The pre-Buddhist situation

In many respects, ancient Indian Buddhism had enough distinctive features that differentiated it from other religious and philosophical currents, so that it could develop and prosper. All the same, the Buddha did, of course, borrow from the

6 The thirty-two [distinctive] marks of a great being (*dvātriṃśa mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa* / *sanshi'er daren xiang* 三十二大人相) are the most important outer signs every Buddha possesses. These thirty-two marks together with the eighty minor distinctive marks of a Buddha (*aṣṭi anuvyañjana* / *bashi zhong sui xing hao* 八十種隨形好 or *bashi zhong hao* 八十種好) constitute the totality of a Buddha's outer marks. In Chinese translations, both lists are often mentioned together by the abbreviation *xiang hao* (相好) that literally means: [all the major] signs [and the] minor [signs]. For recent in-depth research on the thirty-two marks, see OKADA, 1996.

7 This last aspect is, for example, found in the later (Tibetan) scriptural tradition, see KUMAR, 1998: 457.

then-existing philosophical and religious context and his teachings and methods include more than a few pre-Buddhist Indian worldviews. By way of illustration: the Jain tradition knows a list of four types of *jhāṇa* (Skt. *dhyāna*) that refer to 'meditation' as well as to 'thinking': (i) afflicted (*aṭṭa* / Skt. *ārtha*), (ii) wrathful (*rodda* / Skt. *raudra*), (iii) pious (*dhamma* / Skt. *dharmya*), (iv) pure (*sukka* / Skt. *sukla*).⁸ This is how the third *jhāṇa* is defined in the Jain tradition:

Pious *dhyāna* is of four kinds and has four manifestations: examination of the commandments [of the Jinas], examination of sins, examination of the results [of actions], examination of the forms [of the constituents of the world]. These are the four characteristics of pious *dhyāna*: liking for the commandments [of the Jinas], liking for the natural state, liking for the scriptures, liking for pervasive study [of the sacred texts]. These are the four supports of pious *dhyāna*: recitation, questioning, repetition, reflection. These are the four reflections of pious *dhyāna*: reflection on being alone, reflection on transitoriness, reflection on there being no refuge, reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings.⁹

Certainly, religious piety is a key component in many religions, also for Buddhism. The earliest forms of Buddha commemoration (*buddhānusmṛti*) may have been related to the four supports (i.e. approaches / methods) as described for the Jains' pious *dhyāna* (iii): recitation, questioning, repetition and reflection. However, *buddhānusmṛti* has nothing to do with the four [topics] of reflection of this same *dhyāna*, and does not imply reflections on being alone, or without refuge; on the contrary, it is meant as a means to sooth the mind, to provide emotional comfort, protection, etc., and, in later *mahāyāna* currents, to serve as an emulation model. But the horrors that are not thought of when commemorating the Buddha are meditated upon in early Buddhism according to other types of concentrations and commemorations. Since the beginning of Buddhism, these were arranged in more or less standardized lists, in which we also find graver themes, similar to those associated with affliction and desolation in the Jain tradition. Ancient Buddhism too propagates such crude contemplation topics as physical decay and death.

8 Cf. BRONKHORST, 1993: 1.

9 Translation: BRONKHORST, 1993: 2.

3. *Buddha recitation and Buddha commemoration*

The term *buddhānusmṛti*¹⁰ constitutes the name given to the practice of recalling to mind the Buddha's qualities and believers probably never said: "*buddhānusmṛti*" as part of a recitation practice. In contrast *namo buddhāya*¹¹ stands for both the name of a certain recitation that gives praise and honor to the Buddha and the recitation "*namo buddhāya!*" itself.

The two expressions and practices, *buddhānusmṛti* and *namo buddhāya*, are related, although the ancient sources do not necessarily mention them together. The two terms do not appear in a very close relation, neither in the *Ekottarika-āgama* nor in the other Chinese *Āgamas*. Later scriptures, however, do connect these two concepts. The intensity or importance of the connection varies according to text genre and time period.

For example, one of the Chinese *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* translations¹² contains a passage that relates a dialogue between the Buddha and Subhūti.¹³ The theme under discussion refers to 'happy', literally 'lucky' retributions¹⁴ and to the question whether there is any difference between the merit that can be gained from worshipping a [real / normal] Buddha / *Fo* (佛) or a 'Transformation Buddha' / *Hua Fo* (化佛).¹⁵ The Buddha gives several examples of how to obtain a (so called) happy merit:

The Buddha says to Subhūti: "Place the seeds for [your future] happy merit in this 'Transformation Buddha' (化佛), or where he is. If there are good men and good women who with a respectful mind only [focus on practicing] *buddhānusmṛti*, the effect of this good root will end [their] sufferings and produce limitless happiness. Subhūti, set up [the practice

10 *Nian fo* (念佛) in Chinese.

11 Mostly *nan wu fo* (南無佛) in Chinese, but the expression is sometimes rendered as *nan wu Fotuo* (南無佛陀) with the full transcription *Fotuo* (佛陀) for Buddha.

12 The *Mohe banruoboluomi jing* (摩訶般若波羅蜜經, T8, no. 223, is a translation generally attributed to Kumārajīva, but in fact the scripture was expounded by Kumārajīva (什執梵文), translated by Buddhasmṛti (竺佛念傳語) and written down by Hui Zhao (觀肇筆受). Cf. the *Li dai san bao ji* (歷代三寶紀, T49, no. 2034, p. 77b–79a).

13 Xuputi (須菩提).

14 *Fu de* (福德), meaning 'good karmic retributions'. We have here one of the many examples that show how certain concepts that were unheard of by the Chinese, were rendered in translations so as to appeal to a Chinese audience.

15 The term *Hua Fo* (化佛) refers to a Buddha that has been created through magical power by another Buddha. In Chinese translations it is also seen as *Bian hua Fo* (變化佛). 'Transformation Buddhas' are often created out of the light rays emitted by some bodily part of a Buddha.

of performing] *buddhānusmṛti* with a respectful heart. If there are good men and good women who [practice] *buddhānusmṛti* while scattering [even] a single flower into space,¹⁶ [their] sufferings will finally end [and they will produce] limitless happy [retributions]. Subhūti, set up [the practice of performing] *buddhānusmṛti* with a respectful heart, set up [the practice of performing] *buddhānusmṛti* [while] scattering flowers. If there are persons that praise/recite *namo buddhāya* [even only] once [their] sufferings will finally end [and they will produce] limitless happy [retributions]. This is how it is, Subhūti: The seeds [planted] within the field of merit of a Buddha (*buddha-puṇya-kṣetra*)¹⁷ [produce] immeasurable happy [retributions]. Due to this, Subhūti, you should know that there is no difference between a Buddha and a ‘Transformation Buddha’, because all the dharma-marks (*dharma-lakṣaṇa*)¹⁸ are without difference.”¹⁹

At least three significant passages on the *namo buddhāya* practice are found in the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Commentary* (the *Traité*),²⁰ which will be introduced in the next section. The first passage discusses and recommends a concentration on *buddhānusmṛti*, the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, clearly treating this concentration as a practice performed by bodhisattvas. In the same passage the recitation of *namo buddhāya* is apparently recommended to lay people in particular. The last two quotes relate to the above-mentioned extracts of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*.

4. The anusmṛti lists and the Flag Sutra (Dhvajāgra-sūtra) in the *Traité*

Buddha commemoration (*buddhānusmṛti*) is but one possible commemoration / contemplation (*anusmṛti*) within a series of known (Buddhist) commemorations. The extant lists vary in length according to the source material, and also, different lists can sometimes be found in one and the same text. The number of *anusmṛtis* varies from three to ten, but there is no trace of a seven-fold list.²¹

16 The scattering of flowers in space in relation to the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* is also mentioned in other texts, such as for example in the *Mahā-karuṇā-sūtra* (*Da bei jing* 大悲經, T12, no. 380, p. 961b2–5, tr. by Narendrayaśas / Naliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍).

17 *Fo fu tian* (佛福田).

18 *Fa xiang* (法相).

19 My translation from the Chinese (T8, no. 223, p. 375a).

20 The *Da zhi du lun* (大智度論, T25, no. 1509, p. 108c–109a, 646a and 648a–c, tr. by Kumārajīva in 399). See also next note.

21 In the preliminary notes to chapter XXXVI of the *Traité* (see below) LAMOTTE indicates the references to all the lists known from Indic sources, for the *Āgama* / *Nikāya* literature, as well as for the *prajñāpāramitā* literature (LAMOTTE, 1944–1980, vol. III, 1970: 1329–1330).

In the Chinese Canon we have a complete translation of a lost Indian work entitled *Da zhi du lun*.²² The translation, done in the first years of the fifth century C.E. by Kumārajīva²³, represents the only extant version of the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Commentary* by the Indian Buddhist master Nāgārjuna, appropriately called ‘large’ since in Chinese it has a hundred scrolls. The largest, later part of the original treatise was summarized into Chinese, and not translated. The translation of the whole work would have been nearly ten times larger. Now, the huge compendium is usually referred to as *Upadeśa* or *Traité* (a short form of its French title: *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*).²⁴ Although it is a commentary on a / the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, its thematic interests in many instances coincide with those of *Āgama* / *Nikāya* primary and commentarial source material. Such is also the case in regard to the *anusmṛti* list(s). Being a pertinent source material for the topic under discussion, we refer to it here, as well as in later sections of the present study.

In old, canonical texts a frequent *anusmṛti* list is the one of the six *anusmṛti*: *Buddha*-, *dharmā*-, *saṃgha*-, *śīla*-, *tyāga*- and *devatā*- (Commemoration of the Buddha, his teaching, his congregation, morality, non-attachment²⁵ and deities).²⁶ Chapter XXXVI of the *Traité* discusses the eight commemorations of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. These include the former six as well as *ānāpānānusmṛti* (the commemoration of inhaling and exhaling breath) and *marañānusmṛti* (the commemoration of death). It starts with a passage that discusses the location of the eight commemorations within the commentary.

It is said that the eight commemorations come right after the description in chapter XXXV of the nine notions of horror, as a sort of compensation or balance. Whereas chapter XXXV discussed concentration topics that are supposed to provoke feelings of disgust, chapter XXXVI will deal with *buddhānusmṛti* that helps to remove fear.

22 The *Da zhi du lun* (大智度論), T25, no. 1509, p. 57c–756c.

23 Jiumoluoshi (鳩摩羅什).

24 The late professor Étienne LAMOTTE translated the first third of the oeuvre into French between 1944 and 1980 (the other two thirds still remain untranslated) and tentatively entitled the work: *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*. LAMOTTE, 1944–1980, 5 vols.

25 See footnote 116.

26 In his preliminary notes to chapter XXXVI, LAMOTTE also presents the standard Pāli and tentative Sanskrit phrases for the six commemorations (LAMOTTE, vol. III, 1970: 1330–1334).

Here follows the story or metaphor of the *Flag Sūtra* (*Dhvajāgra-sūtra*)²⁷ that teaches that one should commemorate the Buddha in the case of danger or fear, like the Devas (gods), engaged in battle with the Asuras (demons), were told by Indra to commemorate his banner in case of fear. The *Ekottarika-āgama* also includes a reference to this legend as we will see below in connection with the three *anusmṛti*.²⁸

The *Traité* further says that, although in the *Dhvajāgra-sūtra* the Buddha only expounded the commemorations of the Buddha, his teachings (*dharma*) and the Buddhist congregation (*saṃgha*), if a monk recalls his virtues of abandonment (*tyāga*) and / or morality (*śīla*), his fear will equally vanish. Even in case of the commemoration of death (*marañānusmṛti*), the monk will tell himself: “My body, made of the five aggregates (*pañcaskandhakāya*), arises and extinguishes from instant to instant, since birth it has always been associated to death. Why should I, right now, fear death?”²⁹

From the *Traité* we understand that ‘release from fear’ was seen as one of the main purposes of *buddhānusmṛti*, but that according to its author(s), the same purpose can also be reached by the practice of other *anusmṛtis*. Out of a whole series of topics of commemoration, Buddha commemoration was probably seen as one of the most pleasant. The early commentators of *prajñā-paramitā* literature cherished *buddhānusmṛti*, despite the fact that they believed that other *anusmṛtis* could also serve the purpose of dissolving fear, for example, or granting protection, and despite the fact that, at least apparently, it is contrary to the doctrine of *karma* to believe that the Buddha can intervene on one’s behalf. As a matter of fact, so to say ‘miraculous interventions’ of the Buddha on behalf of his believers are also mentioned in a large number of other scriptures, which presupposes the idea that the Buddha can indeed influence other people’s *karma*. The *Dhvajāgra-sūtra* is particular with regard to its comparison with Indra’s army, but not with regard to its mention of the Buddha’s supernatural

27 In the footnotes, LAMOTTE lists all the edited versions of the *Dhvajāgra-sūtra* that were known by 1970 (LAMOTTE, vol. III, 1970: 1335–1338). A complete overview of the known versions is given by Peter SKILLING in his master work on the Tibetan versions of ancient canonical material (SKILLING, 1994). The most important parallels are the Pāli *Dhajagga-sutta*, the *Suvīra-sutta* and the *Susīma-sutta* (*Samyutta-nikāya* 11. 1. 3., 11. 1. 1., and 11. 1. 2.), the Sanskrit manuscript fragments (WALDSCHMIDT, 1932), the Chinese *Samyuttāgama* version (T2, no. 99, p. 255a) and the Tibetan *Mahāsūtra* parallel: the *Dhvajāgra-nāma-mahāsūtra*.

28 Cf. section 8.1.4.

29 LAMOTTE, vol. III, 1970: 1338–1339.

faculties.³⁰ In the same line of thinking, certain Buddhist followers also believed in the supernatural faculties of the Buddha's remains, i.e. in the efficacy of relic and *stūpa* worship.³¹

5. Power and expanse of Buddha recitation, commemoration and meditation

The commemoration of the Buddha – in certain later traditions – evolved into a form of ritualized worship that consists in prayer-like recitations, as evidenced, for example, in the Pure Land schools of Far Eastern Asia. Their worldview expands beyond what we traditionally call 'global' into the spheres of universal cosmology and limitless expansion. In their followers' eyes it must seem correct to fervently recite the name of an extraterrestrial Buddha, believed to reside in some Buddha field (*buddhakṣetra*) far west of our world, especially since he is said to dwell there at present. In other traditions, the practice of commemoration led to deeper meditation practices and techniques. The unprecedented visions of those emerging from these meditations (or concentrations) in return influenced such ideational factors as the cosmological premises for meditation and the modes of salvation.³²

A few centuries after the Buddha's disappearance these new insights were increasingly recorded in written form, as the science of writing started to spread in the territories of Indian culture. More and more Buddhist scriptures emerged, most of which followed (so called) *mahāyāna* tenets. Although they are historically seen as apocrypha, most of them have an introduction in which it is said that they were spoken by the / a Buddha. They were transmitted to foreign lands and empires, such as China, and most of their translations have been handed down till the present day as 'Buddha words' (*buddhavacana*). At the same time, known as well as unknown authors composed in and out of India a

30 Scholars have raised the legitimate question whether the common practice of a worshipper seeking assistance from the Buddha to overcome obstacles (or even for committed sins), is contrary to the doctrine of *karma* (CROSBY, 2005: 248). In fact, similar questions can be raised regarding all the supernatural faculties attributed to the Buddha, and these might be justified hermeneutically on the very basis of the doctrine of *karma*: as the retribution for his eon-long good and right practices.

31 For a brief general overview on the topic see CROSBY, 2005: 247. For an overview on the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* material regarding relics, relic worship and *stūpa*, see LEGITTIMO, 2009.

32 The role of meditation in ideational evolutions and its relation to the multiplication of written sources will be discussed in section 12 of the present paper.

large number of manuals and commentaries on Buddha devotion, meditation, and further topics of pivotal soteriological concern.

The term *buddhānusmṛti* is usually translated into Chinese as *nian fo* (念佛), and in this literal translation it is found throughout the Indian section of the Chinese Buddhist Canon,³³ in early Āgama and Avadāna literature, but also in all established genres of *mahāyāna* scriptures: *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Lotus*, *Avataṃsaka*, *Ratnakūṭa*, *Nirvāṇa*, *Mahāsaṃnipāta*, as well as in all sorts of other *mahāyāna* sūtras,³⁴ and in *Tantra* literature. The concept is also mentioned in *Vinaya* texts, in Indian sūtra commentaries, but also in *Abhidharma*, *Mādhyamika*, *Yoga* and other philosophical treatises. Of course, the attention given to the concept and the intensity with which it is treated differ according to the category of texts. For example, in *Abhidharma* texts we only find very few mentions of Buddha commemoration. It is nevertheless noteworthy that it found its way even into abhidharmic literature and *Vinaya* scriptures.³⁵ For an example of the latter, the *Vinaya in Five Parts*³⁶ mentions a ‘recitative Buddha commemoration’ that serves as scriptural trace closely connecting *namo buddhāya* to *buddhānusmṛti*. It tells the story of a notable of Śrāvastī who recites *namo buddhāya* in an ‘all night long’ Buddha commemoration [till] he falls asleep in total exhaustion.³⁷

6. Buddhānusmṛti according to some ancient commentators

6.1. *Namo buddhāya*, *buddhānusmṛti* and *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* in the *Traité*

The *Prajñāpāramitā Commentary (Traité)* knows various forms of (mental) Buddha devotion: evocation (*namo buddhāya*), commemoration (*buddhānusmṛti*) and a form of commemorative concentration (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*). As the following extract from chapter XII of the *Traité*, on the ‘unobstructed

33 For a general overview on the texts contained in the presently most used Chinese Canon, the *Taishō* edition, see DEMIÉVILLE / DURT / SEIDEL, 1978.

34 *Taishō* vol. 14–17.

35 I conducted these researches on the basis of the Chinese Canon because it includes the largest variety of originally Indian / Indic Buddhist scriptures from the widest range of evolutionary stages, and, because it is fully digitalized and accessible: <<http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index.html>> (last visited April 17 2012). For the Indian part see *Taishō* vols. I–XXXII, text / collection nos. 1–1627.

36 The *Wufen lü* (五分律).

37 (稱南無佛竟夜念佛、疲極得眠). T22, no. 1421, p. 166c25, tr. by Buddhajīva / Fotuoshen (佛陀什) in the year 424.

thought' (*apratihatacitta*) shows, these practices are seen as associated with each other.³⁸

Sūtra: Ils [les Bodhisattva] se tournaient toujours vers la concentration commémorant les Buddha des innombrables champs de Buddha.

Śāstra: Les innombrables champs de Buddha, ce sont les champs de Buddha des dix régions. – La concentration commémorant les Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*) est celle qui perçoit par l'œil de la pensée (*cittacakṣus*), comme s'ils étaient présents, tous les Buddha des dix régions et des trois temps.

Question: – Qu'est-ce que donc que le *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*?

Réponse: – Il est de deux sortes: 1. Selon la théorie des Śrāvaka, c'est voir avec l'œil de la pensée un Buddha unique remplissant les dix régions ; 2. Selon le système des Bodhisattva, c'est commémorer tous les Buddha des dix régions et des trois temps, présents dans les innombrables *buddhakṣetra* (champs de Buddha). [...]

Question: – Les concentrations (*samādhi*) des Bodhisattva sont d'une variété infinie; pourquoi le sūtra fait-il seulement l'éloge des Bodhisattva qui s'adonnent toujours au *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*?

Réponse: –

1. Parce que, en commémorant les Buddha, ces Bodhisattva arrivent à l'état de Buddha. [...]
2. En outre, le *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* peut chasser les passions de toute sorte et les péchés des existences antérieures. [...]

Here follows a short passage that explains that other concentrations can (also) fight and dissolve one or the other vice, and concludes that only the 'concentration on Buddha commemoration' (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*) is capable of eliminating all passions and sins.

3. Enfin, le *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* possède le grand mérite de pouvoir sauver les êtres. Et c'est précisément ce que veulent ces Bodhisattva. Le *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, mieux que tout autre *samādhi*, est capable de détruire rapidement les péchés. En voici une preuve: [...]

Then comes the story of the five hundred merchants who go on a long-distance boat journey, when all of a sudden the giant Makara, king of the fish, approaches their boat and prepares to swallow them.³⁹ The passengers in shock start to

38 LAMOTTE, 1944–1980, vol. I, 1944: 409–415. T15, no. 1509, p. 108c–109b.

39 For the details on the variant versions of the story, see footnote no. 1 in LAMOTTE, vol. I, 1944: 410–413.

invoke their divinities and gods, each one calling upon those he believes in. Depending on the versions, the enumeration ranges from Śiva, Varuṇa, Kubera, Mahendra, Upendra, Vaiśravaṇa, Skanda, Yama, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virūḍhaka, Virūpākṣa, Indra, up to Brahmā, including also the Samudradevatās (the divinities of the ocean). In one of the versions the merchants are even said to implore their family members and attendants. But all these prayers remain without result. Among the passengers is a lay Buddhist follower, one who upholds the five moral precepts,⁴⁰ and he tells the others: “We must together evoke *namo buddhāya* (Homage to the Buddha!). The Buddha is unsurpassable; he can save us from misery.” All the passengers unanimously exclaim in one single shout: *Namo buddhāya*! Now, this fish, in a previous existence, was a bad disciple of the Buddha, he feels remorse, closes his mouth, and the travellers are saved.⁴¹ The commentary infers thereupon:

Si la simple commémoration du Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*) peut [ainsi] effacer des péchés graves et sauver du danger, quels ne sont pas [les bienfaits] de la concentration commémorant les Buddhas (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*)?

4. En outre, le Buddha est le roi de la loi, tandis que les Bodhisattva n’en sont que les capitaines. L’hommage et le respect revient au seul Buddha Bhagavat ; c’est pourquoi il faut toujours commémorer les Buddha.

5. En outre, en commémorant toujours les Buddha, on obtient toutes espèces de qualités et d’avantages. De même qu’un grand ministre qui a reçu des faveurs spéciales commémore toujours son maître, ainsi les Bodhisattva qui doivent au Buddha des qualités de tout genre et une immense sagesse, éprouvent de la reconnaissance et commémorent sans cesse le Buddha. Vous me demanderez pourquoi les Bodhisattva commémorent toujours les Buddha au lieu de pratiquer aussi les autres *samādhi*. Mais dire qu’ils commémorent toujours le Buddha ne signifie pas qu’ils négligent les autres *samādhi* ; cela veut dire qu’ils pratiquent le plus souvent le *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*.

6. Enfin, le sūtra a mentionné plus haut les *samādhi* de la Vacuité (*śūnyatā*), du Sans-marques (*ānimitta*) et de la Non-prise de considération (*apraṇihita*), mais il n’avait rien dit du *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*. C’est pourquoi il en parle ici.⁴²

Following the line of thinking of the *Traité*, the commemorative concentration on the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*) is closely related to *buddhānusmṛti*

40 The five traditional Buddhist lay precepts consist in: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no adultery, and no alcohol (or no intoxicant drinks).

41 LAMOTTE, 1944–1980, 1944: 410–414.

42 LAMOTTE, 1944–1980, 1944: 414–415.

that justifies and emphasises the importance of the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, a topic that will again be taken up below in section nine of the present paper.

6.2. *Buddhānussati* (*buddhānusmṛti*) in the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa

The *Visuddhimagga* is a commentary of the ancient Buddhist canonical texts as contained in the five *Nikāya* of the Theravada tradition. It was composed and compiled by the Indian Buddhist master Buddhaghosa around the year 400 C.E. and is based on the *Vimuttimaggā*, a commentary now extant only in Chinese and Tibetan translations, attributed to an otherwise unknown author called Upatissa.⁴³

The *Visuddhimagga* was compiled by Buddhaghosa at approximately the same time as Kumārajīva translated Nāgārjuna's *Large Prajñāpāramitā Commentary* into Chinese, and might postdate it by several centuries. It is interesting in this regard to note that Buddhaghosa is said to have had South Indian continental ties, and that before him, Nāgārjuna is believed to have been active in the southern part of India too.

Be this as it may, the *Visuddhimagga* says a practitioner should dedicate himself to the Buddha and to his teacher before starting his meditative practice. Among the reasons it gives for doing so, the commentator mentions freedom from fear. Buddhaghosa ascribes the following benefits to the commemoration of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), i.e., to the commemoration of the Buddha's qualities: faith, mindfulness, understanding, merit, the strength to conquer fear and to endure pain, and becoming worthy of veneration. Moreover the practitioner of *buddhānussati* will feel consciousness and shame as if he were in the presence of the Buddha.⁴⁴

6.3. *Buddhānusmṛti* commented by Asaṅga

Asaṅga, an Indian Buddhist master of the fifth century C.E., is the author of several important commentaries. Among the less well-known works of Asaṅga there is a short work, the 'Commentary on Buddha Commemoration' (*Buddhānusmṛti-vṛtti*), that is only extant in a Tibetan translation by the name of *Sangs rgyas rjes su dran pa'i 'grel pa*. The work mainly consists in an in-depth

43 VON HINÜBER, 2000: 123–126.

44 CROSBY, 2005: 270–271.

explanation and eulogy of the qualities of the Buddha on the basis of his epithets as listed in the *Ārya-Buddhānusmṛti*.⁴⁵

After a detailed explanation of the titles of the Buddha, the *Buddhānusmṛti-vṛtti* concludes by praising the Buddha for being perfectly free from attachment, endowed with perfect empathy and perfectly omniscient, as well as for having only taught what is of relevance.⁴⁶

Part II: Textual material from the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*

7. Context and transmission of the *Ekottarika-āgama*

According to the Buddhist tradition, at the beginning of Buddha devotion there was the Buddha. And shortly afterwards, there were his words, committed to memory and handed down orally during several centuries. The structural framework of the early Buddhist teachings and rules is in fact founded on mnemonic devices.

The canonical literature thus begins with the Buddha's oral expositions called sūtras (*sūtra*). After his passing away, these were gathered into four large Buddhist canonical collections called *Āgama* (in Sanskrit) and *Nikāya* (in Pāli). The 'Numerical collection', one of the four Buddhist collections, is only extant in two complete versions: the Pāli *Aṅguttaranikāya* and the Chinese translation of an Indic *Ekottarika-āgama*. The sūtras of the 'Numerical collection' are arranged in numerical order according to the sets of concepts or persons appearing in their subject matter. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* and the *Ekottarika-āgama* represent an intermediate stage between the canonical sūtras and the formation and development of a separate later *abhidharma* tradition. Due to its numerical scheme and its long oral transmission the *Ekottarika-āgama* shows a particular propensity and the necessary flexibility to incorporate new material, from subtle changes up to whole sūtras.

45 For a discussion of this commentary, as well as closely related works by Asaṅga, see the contributions by GODA, 1995; KUMAR, 1998; and NAKAMIKADO, 2010. The last two contributions contain the references for the *Ārya-Buddhānusmṛti*, as well as for its commentaries (*vṛtti* and *ṭīkā*). See KUMAR, 1998: 447–448, and NAKAMIKADO, 2010: 68. For a translation of the epithets from the Tibetan versions of the *Ārya-Buddhānusmṛti* and its *vṛtti* and *ṭīkā*, see KUMAR, 1998: 448–456.

46 NAKAMIKADO, 2010: 81. See also KUMAR, 1998: 455–456.

From the beginning of the Common Era onwards, the number of new scriptures increased drastically thanks to the spread of writing techniques. Reversely, writing spread thanks to the circulation of Buddhist texts. In this process at least part of the *Āgama* or *Nikāya* collections that had been stored in memory during several centuries were also put into writing. In the case of the Chinese *Ēkottarika-āgama*, however, even if there may have existed written transcripts, it is almost certain that none were brought to China at the time of its translation. The emergence and spread of the medium of scripture in Indic territories was certainly a remarkable advance, but the prodigious mnemonic techniques that enabled a man to recite upon request hundreds of texts from memory deserve our utmost admiration.⁴⁷

The *Ēkottarika-āgama* (now only extant in Chinese) contains 476 texts (sūtras). It was learnt by heart in a (yet unidentified) Indic language by a Tokharian monk called Dharmanandin,⁴⁸ and thus memorized, it was brought to China. In 384, shortly after the arrival of Dharmanandin in Chang'an⁴⁹ he recited it from memory and Zhu Fonian⁵⁰ translated it into Chinese under the supervision of one of the first and most renowned indigenous propagators of Buddhism in China, Daoan (314–385).⁵¹ Noteworthy is that the translating monk's religious name literally means 'commemoration of the Buddha', whereas the transmitting monk's name signifies 'the one who rejoices in the *dharma* (teaching)'. In the religious context we might even say: *omen est nomen*. Inasmuch as names and titles constitute significant factors in the dynamics of religious transmission, recited words and devotional formulas also play a significant role in Buddhism.

The following sections present those texts and extracts from the *Ēkottarika-āgama* that relate to Buddha recitation (*namo buddhāya*) or commemoration

47 A paper on "Conservation, évolution, transcription et mémoire en correspondance et obstruction mutuelle: le cas du bouddhisme indien" is in preparation by the present author and will appear within the frame of a publication of the SNFS Projet SINERGIA: *De la construction d'une mémoire religieuse à l'histoire des religions* (Geneva 2012).

48 In Chinese transcription: Tanmonanti (曇摩難提).

49 長安.

50 竺佛念.

51 道安. For the chronicals on this transmission see the *Chu san zang ji ji* (出三藏記集), T55, no. 2145, p. 99b. A paper by the present author on "The First *Āgama* Transmission to China", will appear in: *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, publ. by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012 Singapore.

(*buddhānusmṛti*). In fact, within the older scriptures, these two rarely appear in the same passage. We will first turn our attention to *namo buddhāya*.

8. Textual material on *namo buddhāya* from the Chinese Ekottarika-āgama

8.1. A note on *namo buddhāya*

The *Ekottarika-āgama* contains very few mentions of *namo buddhāya* / *nanwu fo* (南無佛). *Namo* a form of *namas* produced by *sandhi*, means: ‘homage to’, ‘salutation of’, or ‘[the courtesy of] bowing [to somebody with respect]’. It is an expression of adoration and reverence. Interestingly, it was not translated into Chinese – although the ancient Chinese language had certainly enough vocabulary to do so – but phonetically transcribed. In modern Chinese it is pronounced *nanwu*, in ancient times, however, it was pronounced *nammu*.⁵² We can only guess that at the time this expression was transmitted to China, it was on the one hand strongly associated with special powers, and on the other hand, that the Buddhists in China preferred to use a foreign formula of honour that was new to the Chinese, rather than ‘recycling’ one that had been used for other religious entities, family members or socially superior personalities.

8.2. The sūtra on the ‘veneration of the Buddha’ and the ‘five merits’

There is a sūtra in the *Ekottarika-āgama* that discusses the five merits⁵³ resulting from the worship and veneration of the Buddha.⁵⁴ The sūtra in question does not mention *namo buddhāya* but *namas tathāgatāya*.⁵⁵

Most chapters of the *Ekottarika-āgama* contain ten texts and conclude with a verse containing the key terms (*uddāna*) that refer to the contents of the texts and / or to their titles, given in the same order as the sūtras appear in the chapter. This data is strongly abridged,⁵⁶ serves mnemonic purposes, and is therefore linked to its long history of oral transmission. After reciting a chapter (by heart),

52 With a final off-glide, a sort of unpronounced vowel (PULLEYBLANK, 1991: 221 / 325).

53 *Wu shigong de* (五事功德).

54 Cf. scroll 24, chapter 32 called ‘the good assemblies’ / *shan ju* (善聚), T2, no. 125, p. 674a–b.

55 *Nanwu rulai* (南無如來).

56 For identifying each sūtra no more than one or two characters are used. Ten sūtras are usually given in only four five-syllable verses.

the reciter could, with the help of the final *uddāna*, recall whether he had forgotten a *sūtra*.

Now, in the case of this *sūtra*, we do not know how it was actually called, but we have its final key term that says: ‘veneration of the Buddha’.⁵⁷ But as the text focuses on the five merits, it may as well have been called ‘five merits’. It is interesting to note that other *sūtras* of the *Ekottarika-āgama* that have the same formulation use it in a different sense. All five merits are basically related to heaven. They are either associated with the divine qualities one can obtain in heaven: long heavenly life, heavenly beauty, heavenly bliss, heavenly (divine) supernatural powers, and heavenly light and radiance, or, they are specifically used to describe the qualities that enable one to win [the favours] of a heavenly woman.⁵⁸ In both cases the merits (or qualities) are essentially the same, except the fifth one, which in the latter case is divine freedom (autonomy),⁵⁹ instead of divine light.⁶⁰ These merits reflect lay commoners’ aspirations and are not meant as the norm for monks or nuns.

At the end of the text it is said that by this recitation one will obtain a lovely voice. As is often the case with texts of the *Ekottarika-āgama* the *sūtra* has no known Pāli counterpart.⁶¹ The *sūtra* on the five merits goes as follows:

Once the Buddha was staying at the Anāthapiṇḍada monastery in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time, the Bhagavat told the monks: “There exist five merits⁶² [resulting from] serving⁶³ and venerating a / the Buddha.⁶⁴ What are these five? One, a nice [physical] appearance;⁶⁵ two, a lovely voice;⁶⁶ three, great wealth [and] many treasures; four, to be born in an important family;⁶⁷ [and] five, to be reborn in a good place up in heaven [when]

57 *Lifo* (禮佛).

58 *Yi wu shi gong de sheng bi tiannü* (以五事功德勝彼天女).

59 *Tian zizai* (天自在), T2, no. 125, p. 820a.

60 *Tian guangming* (天光明), T2, no. 125, p. 823c.

61 As a last-minute provisional note: It seems that manuscript fragments from Central-Asia contain partly similar data. I thank Gudrun MELZER (University of Leipzig) for this indication (personal communication). Comparative studies between the *Ekottarika-āgama* and the Central-Asian and Indian manuscripts are planned for the near future.

62 *Gong de* (功德) implying the idea of virtue as well as of benefits.

63 *Upasthāna-paricaryā / cheng shi* (承事). The idea conveyed by the Chinese term is ‘to serve a Buddha’ in a general sense, as well as to perform certain services or rituals in his honor.

64 *Li fo* (禮佛).

65 *Duan zheng* (端正).

66 *Hao sheng* (好聲).

67 *Sheng zhang zhe jia* (生長者家): to be born into a family of the upper class, a family that enjoys a higher social status, or into the family of a village chief or a leading clan member.

the body [turns] bad and life ends. [All these merits] are due to [the fact that] the Tathāgata is indeed without equal. In the Tathāgata there is faith, there is morality, there is knowledge, there is wisdom, [and] there is accomplishment of physical beauty.⁶⁸ That is why [there exist these] five merits of accomplishment.

Again, for what reason⁶⁹ does one obtain a nice [physical] appearance by venerating a Buddha? When one sees an image of the Buddha's body / *fo xing xiang* (佛形像) one's heart expresses delight and joy. This is the reason [for which] one obtains a nice [physical] appearance.

Again, for what reason does one obtain a lovely voice? When one sees an image of the Tathāgata's body / *rulai xing xiang* (如來形像) one spontaneously exclaims three times praise to the Tathāgata (*namas tathāgatāya*)⁷⁰ who has reached the truth and the most correct awakening. That is the reason [for which] one obtains a lovely voice.

Again, for what reason [does one obtain] great wealth and many treasures? The reason is that such [a person] sees a Tathāgata and makes great donations, scatters flowers, burns incense, and makes offerings from what is left over. That is the reason [for which] one obtains great wealth and treasures.

Again, for what reason is one reborn in an notable family? If immediately, upon seeing the Tathāgata's body / *rulai xing* (如來形), one's heart is without pollution and attachments [and] one touches the earth with the right knee, [and] kneeling down, joins the hands [and] venerates the Buddha with a perfect mind, by this casual connection one will be reborn in an important family.

Again, for what reason is one reborn in a good place up in heaven [when] the body [turns] bad and life ends? [Thanks to] the permanent *dharma* of all the Buddhas Bhagavats [taught to] all the living beings.

For these five reasons the person who venerates a Tathāgata will be reborn in a good place up in heaven. These, monks, are what are called the five causes and effects of the merits of a Buddha's veneration. Therefore, monks, if there are good men or good women who wish to venerate the Buddha, [you / they] shall seek for expedient means [and] perfect these five merits. Monks, this is how you should undertake this training." When the monks heard what the Buddha had expounded, they rejoiced and accepted the practice.⁷¹

68 The Chinese sentence is unusual and displays abbreviated grammar and vocabulary: *rulai you xin, you jie, you wen, you hui, you shan se chengjiu* (如來有信、有戒、有聞、有慧、有善色成就). T2, p. 674a27–28. The idea is certainly that the Tathāgata is at the source of people's faith and morality, and also of their knowledge (when they have heard his teachings). Wisdom and physical beauty are typical attributes of a Tathāgata. The passage suggests that they can be transferred to the practitioner.

69 Lit. by which causality: *he yin yuan* (何因緣).

70 *Nanwu rulai* (南無如來).

71 I.e., the monks did as they were told and put the teachings into practice: *fengxing* (奉行).

8.3. The *Maitreya-sūtra* of the *Ekottarika-āgama*

Another mention of *namo buddhāya* appears in a poem found in the *Maitreya-sūtra* of the *Ekottarika-āgama*.⁷² No parallel version of this verse is so far known from other scriptures. Among the Pāli *Nikāya* and the extant Chinese *Āgama*, the *Ekottarika-āgama* stands out as the ancient Buddhist canonical collection that is most fond of the future Buddha Maitreya, and it is the only one that contains a sūtra devoted to Maitreya's future buddhahood.

The poem is found at the end of a long devotional section. It has nine verses (*gāthās*) and is spoken by the future Buddha Maitreya.⁷³ A *gāthā* has four *pādas*. The majority of the *gāthās* end with a *pāda* in which Maitreya promises that those who follow his recommendations will come to where he is or will be, i.e., that they will be reborn at the time of his buddhahood on earth. The poem is as follows:

- (1) Merit is increased by keeping the precepts that exhale the fragrance of virtue,⁷⁴ [when] in meditation (*dhyāna*)⁷⁵ [as well as when] thinking or acting; by following good practices in accordance with the *brahmacarya*,⁷⁶ [one will] come to where I am.
- (2) By practicing generosity (*dāna*),⁷⁷ by expressing their joyful hearts, by practicing [in conformity with] the origin / essence of the heart,⁷⁸ those whose intentions are non-existent / *wu* (無), no matter how many thoughts [arise], will all come to where I am.
- (3) By cultivating an equitable mind, by worshipping all the Buddhas, by giving drink and food to holy people (*saṃgha*),⁷⁹ all will come to where I am.

72 The sūtra is found in: T2, no. 125, p. 787c–789c. It is identical to the ‘Sutra on Maitreya’s coming down to birth’ *Mile xia sheng jing* (彌勒下生經), T14, no. 453, a translation that was mistakenly ascribed to Dharmarakṣa / Zhu Fahu (竺法護). For a study of this sūtra and the history of its translation, see: LEGITTIMO, 2010. To summarize the results: from the time of its translation into Chinese this sūtra formed part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* and it was translated by Zhu Fonian. Afterwards, it was extracted, i.e., copied, from the *Ekottarika-āgama*. Then it circulated and was handed down as an independent text, and transmitted in parallel to its original version in the collection. As an independent text, its translation was later wrongly attributed to Dharmarakṣa. The paper further discusses the predominant importance of Maitreya within this particular collection.

73 For the poem cf. T2, p. 789b22–789c10.

74 The idea, or metaphor, that relates virtue to good fragrance is also repeatedly found in the *Dharmapada* / *Udānavarga* literature, especially in the chapters on flowers / plants.

75 *Chan* (禪).

76 The pure (and chaste) conduct that is said to lead to *nirvāṇa*.

77 *Quan shi* (勸施).

78 *Xiuxing xin yuanben* (修行心原本).

- (4) Reciting the precepts and the sūtras, and explaining them well to other beings, brings prosperity to the foundation of the *dharma*. [Those who do that] will come to where I am.
- (5) Śākyamuni's followers⁸⁰ are good at converting the living beings, they worship all the relics,⁸¹ perform ceremonies and *dharma*-related worship, and thus come to where I am.⁸²
- (6) When there are writings and sūtras, those who praise and write them on silk⁸³ and who make offerings of these sūtras, will all come to where I am.
- (7) Those who offer coloured silk and all kinds of things to Buddhist temples,⁸⁴ and who chant 'namo buddhāya', will all come to where I am.
- (8) Those who, in the present, worship and make offerings to all the Buddhas of the past, who practice meditation correctly and with equanimity, without either increase or decrease,
- (9) Who as a result adhere to the Buddha's teachings, undertaking things for the *saṃgha*, and who with a focused heart serve the three jewels, will for sure reach *nirvāṇa*.⁸⁵

79 Lit. holy people: *sheng zhong* (聖衆).

80 Lit. the seeds of Śākya, i.e., the Śākyan clan. The formulation *shi zhong* (釋種) is mostly used to refer to the actual clan members of Śākyamuni, the Śākyans, but here and elsewhere it is employed for the followers of his teachings, and more specifically for Buddhist monks. Note that from the end of the fourth century onwards, Chinese monks used *Shi* (釋) as their 'family name'.

81 *Gongyang zhu sheli* (供養諸舍利).

82 This verse has been analysed in a paper by the present author (LEGITTIMO, 2009).

83 *Yu su shang* (於素上). This expression about the material support of written texts is archaic and its meaning is confirmed by similar usages in older translations, for example those by Lokakṣema / Zhi Loujiachen (支婁迦讖). In the *Dao xing banruo jing* (道行般若經), T8, no. 244, p. 478b, it is said that one should take a good long scroll of silk and write the text carefully from top to bottom in regular lines, and that at the time of writing one should use a good brush and write on good silk (與好長素卷、善書令經上下句相得、書時當得好筆書好素上). The verbs *song* (頌) and *xuan* (宣) employed in the above poem, literally mean to praise and to declare / announce, but there is no doubt that in this passage 宣 stands for writing, either metaphorically, or mistakenly, as it cannot be excluded that it is a copyist's error for *shu* (書): to write, to draw.

84 The term *shen si* (神寺) lit. means 'god's temple', 'divine temple' or 'temple of a deity', but it is used in the *Ekottarika-āgama* to refer to Buddhist temples and / or *stūpa*. Cf. LEGITTIMO, 2009.

85 Lit., the *asaṃskṛta* place, the uncreated (eternal, pure, etc.) place: *wu wei chu* 無為處, a synonym or metaphor for *nirvāṇa*.

8.4. Buddha commemoration connected to Devadatta

A further sūtra of the *Ekottarika-āgama* mentions *namo buddhāya* on several occasions since the particular event related to *namo buddhāya* is repeated and discussed several times within the same narration.⁸⁶ The sūtra is devoted to various episodes related to Devadatta.⁸⁷

Devadatta is the Buddha's cousin. According to the Buddhist tradition, he became one of the Buddha's worst enemies after having been one of his disciples. In several scriptures, it is said that Devadatta tried to create a schism in the monks' community and even made several attempts to kill the Buddha.⁸⁸ The sūtra in question narrates how Devadatta praises himself saying for example that he has greater powers than the Buddha, and that he is capable of even greater miracles than those performed by the Buddha. The text further narrates how Devadatta plotted to kill the Buddha by making king Ajātaśatru's⁸⁹ elephant drunk and inciting it to attack the Buddha who was entering Rājagṛaha with his retinue of monks. But the murder-attempt has a happy ending. Nothing happens to the Buddha. When he sees the infuriated elephant approaching he recites a verse (*gāthā*) and the elephant, hearing the verse, kneels down before the Buddha and licks his feet repenting what it was about to do. Immediately the elephant passes away and is reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.⁹⁰

Afterwards, Devadatta accuses the Buddha of having killed the elephant through magic and mantras, saying that since the Buddha is able to bend hetero-

86 Cf. T2, no. 125, p. 802b–806a.

87 The transcription Tipodadou (提婆達兜) for Devadatta ending with *dou* (兜) instead of *duo* (多) is rather rare. It was probably created by Fa Ju (法炬). The earliest text containing this transcription is his translation of the *Sūtra on King Ajātaśatru's interrogation on the Five Cardinal Sins / A she shi wang wen wu ni jing* (阿闍世王問五逆經, T14, no. 508, p. 775c, translated at the end of the 3rd, or beginning of the 4th century). The next set of four sūtras are translations by Zhu Fonian, and lastly the *Buddhacarita* translated by Dharmakṣema / Tan wu chen (曇無讖), that postdates Zhu Fonian's translations by a few years or decades (the *Fo suo zing zan* 佛所行讚, T4, no. 192, p. 41b2, tr. around 414–421).

88 Buddhist texts narrate a series of sufferings the Buddha had to endure in his last existence due to the bad *karma* of previous lives. The narrations on the Buddha's sufferings vary according to textual traditions. Among the better-known sufferings, two are related to Devadatta: the mad elephant episode and another attempt by Devadatta to kill the Buddha by throwing a large stone from a high cliff. The stone hurt the Buddha's foot, but did not kill him either.

89 Asheshi wang (阿闍世王).

90 Sanshisan tian (三十三天).

dox masters, it is obvious that he can do so with a being belonging to the realm of beasts. Devadatta then encounters a kind nun who advises him to repent those extremely bad things he did, saying that now repentance is still easy, whereas later it will be difficult, but Devadatta gets very angry, and, hitting her with his own hands, ends up killing her.

Devadatta then becomes very ill and repents his deeds.⁹¹ He asks the other monks to carry him to the Buddha. They follow his orders. Ānanda sees Devadatta approaching from afar and informs the Buddha that Devadatta now feels repentance in his heart⁹² and that he wants to ask the Tathāgata to accept his repentance / pardon.⁹³ The Buddha, however, tells Ānanda that Devadatta will not be able to come up to where he is. In fact, while being carried to where the Buddha is, Devadatta thinks it is appropriate not to get up from his couch, as he is ill, and thus he does not step onto the earth. At that time from within the earth arises a great wind of fire which coils [and] surrounds Devadatta's body. Devadatta is burned by fire, at the moment he emits thoughts of repentance towards the Tathāgata and rightly wishes to recite *namo buddhāya*.⁹⁴ He is, however, not able to speak it out before passing away. The very moment he recited *namo buddhāya* he entered into hell.

At that time, Ānanda, seeing Devadatta falling into hell, asks the Bhagavat: "Did Devadatta, reaching today the end of his life, enter hell?" The Buddha replies: "Devadatta, having given rise to a bad heart, was approaching the Tathāgata; but, his body having turned bad and his life having ended, he entered the Avīci hell."⁹⁵ Then Ānanda weeps sadly and without self-control. The Buddha asks Ānanda why he is weeping so sadly, and Ānanda says that he knows that he has not yet exhausted the desires and passions of his heart. At that time the Bhagavat recites a poem for Ānanda and tells him that Devadatta will have to stay in hell during one great eon (*mahākalpa*),⁹⁶ but that after his stay in hell he will be reborn in good places in heaven, where, during sixty small *kalpas*, he will not fall down into the realm of the three bad destinies and instead will come and go among the gods and humans. At the end of his heavenly stay,

91 *Chanhui* (懺悔).

92 *Hui xin* (悔心).

93 *Qiu gai hui guo* (求改悔過).

94 *Nanwu fo* (南無佛).

95 *Abi diyu* (阿鼻地獄). According to the Buddhist tradition, this is the worst of all hells. Note that when a hell is mentioned by name in the early strata of Buddhist scriptures, when a certain evil person is said to have fallen into hell, it is mostly the Avīci.

96 *Da jie* (大劫).

Devadatta will receive a human body, cut his hair and beard, and, with a strong and firm belief, will take the three refuges, leave his home (i.e., become a monk), study the path and become a *pratyekabuddha*⁹⁷ by the name of 'Namo'.⁹⁸ The Buddha further explains that a good intention, lasting even an instant as short as the wink of an eye, brings immeasurable luck (i.e. good *karma*). All the more so will Devadatta, who has extensively recited and studied [a great many things] about the past, the future and the present,⁹⁹ and who has remembered all the teachings without ever forgetting what he heard, receive a good retribution for this. But Devadatta's previous hatred and enmities will also weigh upon his destiny: the fact that he has committed a murder and that he has turned towards the Tathāgata with the intention of hurting him. Although this made him fall into hell, due to his good deeds of previous times, when he used to turn towards the Tathāgata with a joyful heart, he will be reborn in heaven after the punishments of hell. And it is due to the fact that Devadatta at the very end of his life gave rise to kind feelings and recited *namo* that he will later become a *pratyekabuddha* by the name of 'Namo'.

We further read in the same sūtra that Maudgalyāyana¹⁰⁰ proposes to visit Devadatta in the Avīci hell and that the Buddha allows him to do so. In hell there occurs a somewhat humorous but macabre anecdote when the guardians try to find out which Devadatta Maudgalyāyana wants to talk to, as apparently there are several Devadattas, monks and laymen, related to different Buddhas. Finally they understand which Devadatta Maudgalyāyana means and in fact it is just the one they are holding pierced on a great fork, roasting his body over the fierce flames of a great fire. The guardians tell Devadatta to look up and when he does so he sees Maudgalyāyana and pronounces a *gāthā* in his praise. Then Maudgalyāyana in a *gāthā* says who he is, and Devadatta is indeed surprised and wishes to know what such a great person is doing in this hell where people are condemned without any chance ever to be rescued. Maudgalyāyana tells him that Śākyamuni Buddha Tathāgata's love towards the sentient beings is like that of a mother towards her children, and he repeats the prophecy spoken by the Buddha. Devadatta greatly rejoices at these words. There follows a discussion between Maudgalyāyana and Devadatta. And the latter says:

97 *Bizhi fo* (辟支佛).

98 *Hao ming yue nan wu* (號名曰南無).

99 In the Buddhist context the expression *gu ming jin* (古明今) for 'past, future and present' was created by Zhu Fonian and within the translated sections of the Chinese Canon it is exclusively used by him. The full phrase is: *bo gu ming jin* (博古明今).

100 *Mulian* (目連).

I entrust/charge Maudgalyāyana to worship [on my behalf] with his head the Bhagavat's foot [and to inquire whether everything in his] life is easy and going fine, [and whether] he feels healthy and strong enough to travel around. Also salute the venerable Ānanda.

At that moment, the venerable Maudgalyāyana, connected to great supernatural powers, stops the sufferings and pains of the Avīci hell by releasing these powers. He too speaks a *gāthā*:

Everybody recites *namo buddhāya*, the Śākya master is the most victorious one, He can offer peace and happiness and eliminate all sufferings and worries.¹⁰¹

At that time 60.000 people are made to overcome their sins and are reborn in the upper heavens of the four kings (*Cāturmahārājakāyika*).¹⁰² Maudgalyāyana returns to where the Bhagavat is and worships his feet with his head; then, staying at one side, conveys to the Buddha Devadatta's salutations, transmits his immeasurably respectful veneration and his inquiries regarding the Buddha's life and travels, as well as his salutations to Ānanda. Maudgalyāyana also repeats Devadatta's words: "The Tathāgata having informed me that in sixty *kalpas* I will become a *pratyekabuddha* called Namō, even if I were to lie on my right side in the Avīci hell till the end, I will not get tired." The Buddha is very pleased with Maudgalyāyana's report. The sūtra ends with the Buddha's advice to turn to the three treasures with a respectful heart, to uphold the precepts and to watch one's bodily, oral and mental deeds.¹⁰³

Two important Chinese anthologies quote this sūtra: the *Shijia pu* (釋迦譜)¹⁰⁴ and the *Fa yuan zhu lin* (法苑珠林).¹⁰⁵ The former presents the text in a slightly shortened way and the latter in a very shortened form.

Devadatta's rescue from hell is indeed an important and serious issue for Buddhist soteriology and later philosophical developments. In Buddhist literature, Devadatta is the evil person *par excellence*. Because he repeatedly tried to kill the Buddha, he is considered to be as wicked, or even more so, than King Ajātaśatru who killed his own father.

101 T2, no. 125, p. 805c.

102 *Si tian wang* 四天王.

103 亦有恭敬之心向於三寶、亦復不奉持禁、不具足身。口。意行, T2, no. 125, p. 806a.

104 T50, no. 2040, p. 58b28–59a27.

105 T53, no. 2122, p. 450b–c.

9. Textual material on buddhānusmṛti from the Chinese Ekottarika-āgama

9.1. *Buddhānusmṛti* in connection with other *anusmṛti*

9.1.1. Verses from the ‘first introductory chapter’

The Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* collection starts in a remarkably unusual way: a very long poem in seven-character verses constitutes the opening part of its introduction. The verses are followed by a text that is mostly in prose. Together, these two sections (verses and prose) constitute the ‘first introductory chapter’¹⁰⁶ of the collection. It is contained within the first scroll of the *Ekottarika-āgama*¹⁰⁷ and clearly differs from the ‘introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*’¹⁰⁸ written by Daoan.¹⁰⁹ The ‘first introductory chapter’ is highly particular or even unique. Its content is explanatory and points towards ‘editorial activity’ (written or oral), as if it had been added to the collection to make it attractive and / or to promote it.

Buddhānusmṛti appears in the opening verses together with a great number of other concepts that must have played an important role for the transmitters of this *Āgama*. It is the first remembrance of the list of ten that is also known from other sources. Noteworthy is that a sūtra is told in verses:

[I will relate] something I¹¹⁰ heard when the Buddha was staying together with his disciples at Śrāvastī [at the] Jeta[vana] monastery in the park donated by the doer of good deeds, the important man (Anāthapiṇḍika).¹¹¹ [Once] when the Buddha was staying there he told the monks: ‘You should practice a [particular] *dharma* single-mindedly focused on it, and reflect on [that] single *dharma* without [ever] neglecting it. Which are the single *dharma*? They are the remembrance / commemoration of the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*),¹¹² [also] the

106 *Xu pin di yi* (序品第一), T2, no. 125, p. 549b8–552c8.

107 *Zeng yi ahan jing juan di yi* (增壹阿含經卷第一).

108 *Zeng yi ahan jing xu* (增壹阿含經序), T2, no. 125, p. 549a4–b6.

109 The *Dīrgha-āgama* (*Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經, T1, no. 1, p. 1b8–149c24) has also such a chronicle introduction, the *Chang ahan jing xu* (長阿含經序, T1, no. 1, p. 1a4–b6), but this collection has no ‘introductory chapter’ (序品) within its text.

110 The first person refers to Ānanda.

111 *Zhangzhe* (長者) in Buddhist Chinese translations, especially in those by Zhu Fonian, does not simply stand for a senior, venerable, elderly man. It is rather employed for an important and rich man, or even for a (village or clan) chief. The term is not (merely) used to denote the venerable greatness a virtuous man acquires by aging, but it strongly suggests that the person in question is influential and has a certain political as well as financial power.

112 *Nian fo* (念佛).

remembrance of the teaching (*dharmānusmṛti*),¹¹³ the remembrance of the monks' community (*saṃghānusmṛti*),¹¹⁴ as well as the remembrance of the moral precepts (*śīlānusmṛti*),¹¹⁵ the remembrance of non-attachment / generosity (*tyāgānusmṛti*),¹¹⁶ [to these we also have to] add the following: the remembrance of the gods (*devānusmṛti*),¹¹⁷ the remembrance of stopping [mental activity],¹¹⁸ [the remembrance of] breathing [techniques] (*ānāpāna*),¹¹⁹ and the remembrance of the body (*kāyagatānusmṛti*)¹²⁰ [as well as] the remembrance of death (*marāṇānusmṛti*).¹²¹ [These *dharmas*] eliminate confusion [and] are called the ten remembrances. They are called the ten remembrances because they are ten [and] they shall forever be recalled [by] the disciples of the Bhagavat.¹²²

9.1.2. Extract from the second chapter

The second chapter of the collection begins like this:

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at the Anāthapiṇḍada monastery in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time, the Bhagavat told the monks: 'You should practice one [particular] *dharma* and should widely spread [the practice of this] one *dharma* [by which you] will fully develop [your] divine powers (*abhijñā*),¹²³ abandon all confused thoughts, obtain the fruit of a *śramaṇa*,¹²⁴ and send yourself to *nirvāṇa*. What is [this] one / single *dharma*? It is the remembrance of the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*). You should properly practice [this *dharma*] and you should widely spread [its practice by which you] will fully develop your divine powers, abandon all confused thoughts, obtain the fruit of a *śramaṇa*, and send yourself into *nirvāṇa*. That is why, monks, [you] should practice [this] one *dharma* and should widely spread this *dharma*. Monks, that is how you should undertake this

113 *Fa nian* (法念).

114 *Seng nian* (僧念).

115 *Jie nian* (戒念).

116 *Shi nian* (施念). In Buddhism *tyāga* has at least two distinguishable but partially overlapping semantic fields: (1) abandonment, i.e. non-attachment in regards to possession and (2) material generosity. Noteworthy is that the Chinese term only conveys the second meaning.

117 *Tian nian* (天念).

118 On the difference between *xinian* (息念) and *anbannian* (安般念) see footnote 127.

119 *An nian* (安般).

120 *Shen nian* (身念).

121 *Si nian* (死念).

122 T2, no. 125, p. 550b14–20. Translated by the present author from the Chinese. For a French translation see HUYËN-VI, 1985: 36.

123 *Shen tong* (神通).

124 *Shamen guo* (沙門果). What is meant here are the good retributions of leading the proper (chaste) Buddhist life.

training.’ When the monks heard what the Buddha had expounded, they rejoiced and practiced accordingly / put [his teachings] into practice.¹²⁵

This passage is in fact a sort of introduction to chapter two that discusses the ten commemorations in detail. There exists an approximate parallel in Pāli that lists all the ten remembrances, including *buddhānussmṛti* (in Pāli: *buddhānussati*).¹²⁶ The Pāli version nevertheless differs from the Chinese as it recommends many other practices too with a minor focus on *buddhānussmṛti* and without giving the many details found in the *Ēkottarika-āgama*.

9.1.3. The ten *anusmṛti* in the final *uddāna* verse of the second chapter

The ten remembrances reappear at the end of the first scroll in the concluding *uddāna* verses.

Remembrance of the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṃgha*, remembrance of the moral precepts, generosity and the gods, remembrance of [giving one’s thoughts] a rest and of [controlling one’s] in-breathing and out-breathing, remembrance of stopping [mental activity] (息),¹²⁷ remembrance of the body and of death, now and in the future.¹²⁸

9.1.4. The three *anusmṛti* of the *Ēkottarika-āgama*’s *Flag Sūtra* and the epithets of the Buddha

Buddhānussmṛti can also come in the same grouping as the three-fold refuge (*triśaraṇagamana*). The three-fold commemoration (*anusmṛti*) upon the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṃgha* eventually came to be associated with a protective character. When a Buddhist follower would encounter a terrifying situation, he could overcome his fear through a close devotional relationship with the

125 T2, no. 125, p. 552c. Translated by the present author from the Chinese. For a French translation see HUYËN-VI, 1986: 31.

126 *Aṅguttaranikāya* I. 20. 93–102, cf. AKANUMA, 1929: 120.

127 The Sanskrit term for this recollection is uncertain. The difference between *xinian* (息念) and *anbannian* (安般念) is that the first is in fact a meditation that aims at stopping thoughts from arising in the mind (心意想息) (cf. T2, no. 125, p. 556a5–9). The second recollection is related to breathing techniques and aims at controlling the duration or rhythm of breath (cf. T2, no. 125, p. 556b1–9). HUYËN-VI, 1986: 31, translates *xinian* (息念) as ‘l’arrêt du souffle’ (stop of breath) and adds in the footnote that this is different from the Pāli that has *upāsamanussati*, the commemoration related to calmness. The Chinese term *xinian* (息念), lit. ‘remembrance of stop’, is misleadingly short and for a better rendering it is best to supply ‘mental activity’ in brackets, as I suggest in the above translation.

128 T2, no. 125, p. 553c2–6. 佛法聖衆念 戒施及天念 休息安般念 身死念在後.

Buddha. The *Flag Sūtra* (*Dhvajāgra-sūtra*) discussed in section three was most probably an important source regarding Buddha commemoration and its possible effects.¹²⁹

In the *Ekottarika-āgama* version, too, the Buddha advises Buddhist followers to recall the Buddha when they experience terrifying fear. Like heavenly warriors recall the flags of the gods Īśa and Varuṇa in a moment of fear, such as before a battle, the believers should recall the Buddha by recollecting his epithets:

If you experience great fear, your clothes and hair standing on end, then you should focus your mind on me / my body,¹³⁰ [and think]: This is (1) the Tathāgata, (2) Arhat, (3) Samyaksaṃbuddha (perfectly awakened), (4) Vidyācaraṇasampanna (who's wisdom and deeds are perfect), (5) Sugata (well gone), (6), Lokavid (who understands the world), (7) Anuttarapuruṣadamyasārathi (unsurpassable lord and chief among men), (8) Śāstādeva-manuṣyānām (teacher of gods and men), (9) called the Buddha, (10) Bhagavat (honorable one),¹³¹ [and he has] appeared in the world.¹³² In a case of great fear, [when even] clothes and hair stand on end, [this] will [thus] pass away by itself.¹³³

The sūtra further teaches – for the same purpose of appeasement – to recall also the *dharma* and the *saṃgha*, whereas the later commentators of *prajñāpāramitā*

129 For references to its versions, see footnote 27 of the present paper.

130 *Nian wo shen* (念我身).

131 (1) *Rulai* (如來), (2) *Zhi zhen* (至真), (3) *Deng zhengjue* (等正覺), (4) *Ming xing cheng wei* (明行足), (5) *Shan shi* (善逝), (6) *Shijian jie* (世間解), (7) *Wu shang shi dao fa yu* (無上士道法御), (8) *Tian ren shi* (天人師), (9) *Fo* (佛), (10) *Zhong you* (衆祐). For the last term see WALDSCHMIDT, 1932: 48, who translates it as 'der Schirmer der Gemeinde'. See also SKILLING, 1994: 412, for the question whether the 'protector of the congregation' could be glossed as '*bhagavat*'.

132 The list of the ten titles of the Buddha employed here (如來. 至真. 等正覺. 明行成為. 善逝. 世間解. 無上士道法御. 天人師. 號佛. 衆祐) is exclusively used by Zhu Fonian in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, where it appears another dozen times. In other translations he used similar but nevertheless differing lists. For example, in the *Womb-sūtra* (*Pusa chutai jing* 菩薩處胎經, T12, no. 384), there are different renderings for *arhat* and *bhagavat* as well as some further minor differences (如來. 應供. 正遍知. 明行足. 善逝. 世間解. 無上士調御丈夫. 天人師. 佛. 世尊). For this topic, see LEGITTIMO, 2005: 8, 18, 62, etc. and LEGITTIMO, 2006: 19, 78, etc. The list employed in the *Womb-sūtra* was used by many other translators and is rather wide-spread. In contrast, lists containing *wusuo zhu* (無所著) for *arhat* are exclusively found in the Chinese *Madhyamāgama*, a translation by Saṃghadeva. For an interesting study on the lists of the ten epithets of the Buddha in older translations, cf. NATTIER, 2002.

133 T2, no. 125, p. 615a16–19.

affiliation explain that other *anusmṛti* can also have the same effect, even if the Buddha did not mention them in the *Dhvajāgra-sūtra*.

9.1.5. The ten *anusmṛtis* in the Vīrasena story

We further have in the *Ekottarika-āgama* a sūtra related to Buddha commemoration that has no parallel version. It is the story of the wealthy but selfish householder of Vaiśālī, Vīrasena, who is urged by the Buddha to become a monk as otherwise he will be reborn in hell. The Buddha foresees that he will die in seven days. Vīrasena hesitates and prefers to enjoy life. He agrees to become a monk only on the last day of his life. At that time Ānanda is made his instructor and instructs him on the ten *anusmṛtis*.

Vīrasena escapes hell by assiduously (though briefly) practicing the ten *anusmṛtis* shortly before he passes away. In his groundbreaking study on *buddhānusmṛti* in the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, Paul Harrison mentions this story in his introduction, and makes a good point translating a curious metaphor the Buddha tells Ānanda towards the end of the sūtra: “Should a being practice the ten *anusmṛtis* with uninterrupted faith, even if only for the time it takes to milk a cow, then his merit will be immeasurable.”¹³⁴ The sūtra itself is, in fact, rather long and has two different parts.

In the first part, Ānanda is terrified by this man’s future destiny as described by the Buddha. The Buddha predicts that the man is going to pass away in seven days and fall into hell because he has separated himself from his good roots. Ānanda worries for this man in a very compassionate way and therefore inquires whether there is anything that could divert Vīrasena’s destiny in such a way that he would not have to die in seven days. The Buddha informs him that there is no way Vīrasena could escape imminent death. Then Ānanda inquires whether something could prevent him from falling into hell. To this the Buddha replies that the man can only be saved if he becomes a monk, taking refuge and following the [Buddhist] path. Ānanda then goes to see Vīrasena and tells him what he has heard from the Buddha. Vīrasena is frightened, but takes his time. Ānanda goes to see him every day, repeating his advice to enter the Buddhist order. The man, however, wants to take advantage of his remaining days and enjoys himself. He follows Ānanda only on the last day and goes to see the Buddha. The Buddha compliments Ānanda on his success, the man’s hair is cut,

134 HARRISON, 1978: 36–37.

he is given a monk's robes, and he is made to study the correct *dharma* (使學正法). Here begins the second part of the sūtra:

[...] At that time Ānanda instructs that [new] monk [Vīrasena] and says: "You must recall and practice remembrance of the Buddha, remembrance of the teaching, remembrance of the monks' community, etc., remembrance of the moral precepts, remembrance of generosity, remembrance of the gods / deities, remembrance of stopping [the mental activity], remembrance of breathing [techniques], remembrance of the body, and remembrance of death. You have to practice the *dharma* like this, which means, monk, that by practicing these ten *anusmṛtis* [you] will obtain great results,¹³⁵ [you] will obtain the 'sweet dewy taste of *dharma*'."¹³⁶ At that time Vīrasena practiced the *dharma* in that way. Immediately, that very day, his life ended and he was reborn among the four heavenly kings.

At that time Ānanda cremated his body at once,¹³⁷ returned to where the Bhagavat was, worshipped his feet with his head and face and stood at one side. At that time Ānanda said to the Buddha: "[Now] that his life has ended, where is he reborn?" The Bhagavat said: "[Now that] his life has ended, he is reborn in the heaven of the Trāyastriṃśa gods. During several lives¹³⁸ he will be reborn in the realm of Yāma,¹³⁹ in the Tuṣita heaven,¹⁴⁰ in the Nirmāṇarati heaven,¹⁴¹ and in the Paranirmitavaśavartin heaven.¹⁴² [And after] those lives end he will come to be born among the four heavenly kings.¹⁴³

This means, Ānanda, that the monk Vīrasena [will have to undergo] seven changes, taking turns among the heavenly beings, [only] after that will he finally obtain a human body again. He will [then] become a monk and study the path. He will end all sufferings. This will be thus because he has a faithful heart towards the Tathāgata. Ānanda, you must know that the earth of this Jambudvīpa¹⁴⁴ is from south to north 21.000 *yojanas*¹⁴⁵ [long] and from east to west 7.000 *yojanas* [broad]. Should a person make offerings to a person of the land of

135 *Da guo bao* (大果報), meaning 'very favourable, good retributions'.

136 *Ganlu fa wei* (甘露法味). The sweet dew stands for the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). In Buddhist literature it is used to refer to liberation and *nirvāṇa*. This concept has been discussed in a comparative text study with reference to the *Ekottarika-āgama* (LEGITTIMO, 2007).

137 *She wei bi shen* (闍維彼身).

138 *Zhan zhuan* (展轉).

139 *Yan tian* (豔天). Yāma resides in the third heaven of the Kāmadeva heavens in the *kāmadhātu*.

140 *Dou shu tian* (兜術天).

141 *Hua zizai tian* (化自在天). The fifth Kāmadeva heaven. In Chinese literally: the heaven in which one dwells after converting to Buddhism by oneself.

142 *Ta hua zizai tian* (他化自在天), the sixth Kāmadeva heaven. In Chinese: the heaven in which one dwells having been converted by another.

143 *Si tianwang* (四天王).

144 *Yan fu ti* (閻浮提).

145 *You xun* (由旬).

Jambudvīpa,¹⁴⁶ will his lucky [retributions] be many or not?” Ānanda replies to the Buddha: “They will be very numerous indeed, Bhagavat!” The Buddha says to Ānanda: “In case there is a living being who for an instant [as short] as milking a cow, practices the ten remembrances with a faithful heart and without interruption, his lucky [merits] will be immeasurable. Nobody is able to measure them. Thus, Ānanda, you should ask for expedient means, practice the ten remembrances, thus, Ānanda, you should undertake this training.” When Ānanda heard this exposition given by the Buddha, he rejoiced and put it into practice.¹⁴⁷

9.1.6. The ten *anusmṛti* as a means to overcome suffering

In another sūtra the Buddha teaches the ten remembrances to a group of monks who did not know how to reply to basic questions regarding the most important tenets of the Buddha’s teaching. *Buddhānusmṛti* is only briefly mentioned within the context of a complete enumeration of the ten commemorations.¹⁴⁸ The sūtra is rather long and instructs on the fundamental practices that lead to the complete extinction of one’s sufferings. The text starts with a single point, continues with a two-fold concept, then it discusses a three-fold one, etc., up to ten. In Pāli there are two partial parallels of this sūtra, both are found in the *Āṅguttaranikāya*, following one another, and both are called the *Sūtra of the Great Question* (*Mahāpañhāsutta*).¹⁴⁹ The first one can be considered as the ‘base text’ and the second one is a parallel version said to have been taught by a nun of Kajangalā upon the explicit request from a group of lay followers who wanted to hear this particular sūtra. The divergences between the *Ekottarika-āgama* text and the two Pāli parallels are more important than the similarities. To explain the reasons why these sūtras, especially the one of the *Ekottarika-āgama* and the Pāli ‘base text’, can nevertheless be considered as parallels, it is best to start with their similarities, i.e. their nearly identical setting and frame story.

A group of monks, disciples of the Buddha, did not know how to reply to basic questions regarding the most important tenets of the Buddha’s teaching. When followers of rival religious movements asked them to summarize the essence of the Buddha’s teaching and to explain in what it differs from the views held by other masters, the monks kept silent. Since they had left without giving an answer, they decided to ask the Buddha what they should reply when con-

146 Yan fu li (閻浮里). Note the slightly different transcriptions within just a few lines.

147 T2, no. 125, p. 740a2–24.

148 Cf. T2, no. 125, p. 778b–780a for the full Chinese version of the sūtra, and p. 779c26 for the mention of *buddhānusmṛti*.

149 Pāli *Āṅguttaranikāya* X, 3. *Mahāvagga*, 7. *Paṭhamamahāpañhāsutta*, 27 and 28.

fronted with such questions. The Buddha instructed them how they should reply when asked about the most salient doctrinal point, when asked about the two most salient doctrinal points, etc., up to ten.

In the second Pāli parallel version a group of lay followers of Kajangalā know that the Buddha once taught the above-mentioned exposition, and, desirous to hear the details of the sūtra, they approach and ask a local nun to tell them the content of this teaching. At the beginning of her exposition, the nun admits that she has not heard the details of the Buddha's teaching, but nevertheless proposes to explain it as best she can. Her explanations indeed partly differ from those given by the Buddha. Nevertheless, when the lay followers, taking her advice, subsequently go to see the Buddha and repeat the nun's exposition, the Buddha is said to fully approve her teaching by saying: "It is well! It is well, housefathers! A wise woman is the Kajangalan nun. If you, housefathers, were to come to me and ask about the meaning of this I should give just the same explanation as that given by the Kajangalan nun. Indeed that is the meaning of it, and so should ye bear it in mind."¹⁵⁰

Without getting bogged down in details, what seems significant is that both Pāli sūtras have been handed down by the Pāli tradition as sanctioned by the Buddha, and that they have been transmitted together although their contents partly differ.¹⁵¹ The very structure of this sūtra allows for a great variety of content, as there are multiple possibilities regarding which doctrinal points (single, twofold, threefold, etc.) may be considered most efficient to erase human sufferings. Considering the potential for variation in content, it is not surprising that the *Ekottarika-āgama* text differs from both extant Pāli versions, and that these two again differ from each other. As mentioned above, in the *Ekottarika-āgama* sūtra *buddhānusmṛti* appears within the context of the enumeration of the ten remembrances and thus it is found in the last part of the 'explanatory section' of the sūtra. The tenth section of the Pāli text(s) neither refers to *buddhānusmṛti*, nor to the ten commemorations. The Pāli texts follow a very different train of thought. The 'base text' exhorts the monks to feel disgust for the ten unwholesome deeds (*akusala kammaṣaṭṭha*) without explaining them in detail. The whole sūtra displays a strongly abridged nature and since the list of

150 WOODWARD, 2003: 40.

151 Cf. WOODWARD, 2003: 33, footnote 1, for a comparative table that includes the Pāli versions mentioned here, as well as a related text, the *Kumārapañha*. Interesting is that on certain occasions the explanations given by the nun bear a similar meaning as the 'base text' but they are given 'in positive form', i.e. from the perspective of what one should engage in and not from the perspective of what one should avoid and feel disgust for.

the ten unwholesome deeds is a *locus communis* in Buddhist literature, its components were omitted.¹⁵² In contrast, the Pāli sūtra expounded by the nun explains the actions one should engage in, focus on and practice, namely, the ten wholesome deeds (*kusala kammaṭṭha*). Thus, the two Pāli versions discuss a similar issue in the tenth section, but do so from opposite perspectives, and none of them shares the point of view of the *Ekottarika-āgama* that the ten commemorations constitute the core practice to overcome human suffering.

9.1.7. The ten *anusmṛti* eradicating erotic passion and arrogance

In scroll forty-two of the *Ekottarika-āgama* we have another sūtra – though a very short one – that discusses the ten *anumṛtis* and is so far without known parallels:¹⁵³

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at the Anāthapiṇḍada monastery in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time, the Bhagavat told the monks: ‘There are ten remembrances *shì nian* (十念) that [should be] widely analyzed and practiced [and that lead to] the end and dissociation from passionate love, physical love, non-physical love, pride, arrogance, and ignorance. What are these ten? They are: remembrance of the Buddha, remembrance of the teaching, remembrance of the monks’ community, remembrance of the moral precepts, remembrance of generosity, remembrance of the gods, remembrance of stopping [the mental activity],¹⁵⁴ remembrance of breathing [techniques] (*ānāpāna*), remembrance of the body, and remembrance of death. Thus, I say, monks, that the people who practice these ten remembrances put an end to, and separate themselves from: passionate love, physical love, non-physical love, from all [forms of] ignorance, from pride and arrogance, getting rid of them and extinguishing them all. That is how, monks, you should follow this teaching.’ When the monks heard the Buddha’s exposition they rejoiced and put it into practice.¹⁵⁵

152 These would be: killing, theft, adultery, lying, harsh speech, spiteful speech, meaningless / silly speech, covetousness, malevolence and heresy.

153 The position and number of the sūtra in question display certain anomalies: although it is number five, it was inserted at the end of the scroll, right after number ten. Interestingly, at first sight sūtra number five of this scroll seems to be missing between the texts numbered four and six. It is however there, albeit attached to number four. The ‘real’ sūtra number five merely lacks its own number, and it was probably called ‘the four fearless states’ / *sì wú suǒ wèi* (四無所畏).

154 The above passage had *xinian* (息念) where this text has *nianzhiguan* (念止觀).

155 T2, no. 125, p. 780c.

9.1.8. The ten *anusmṛti* among the deeds that lead to *nirvāṇa*

In the chapter on good and evil deeds of the *Ekottarika-āgama* the ten *anusmṛtis* are presented in the context of the deeds that lead to *nirvāṇa*.

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at the Anāthapiṇḍada monastery in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time, the Bhagavat told the monks: ‘When living beings pursue ten *dharma* [of a certain kind] they will be reborn above in heaven, [when] they pursue ten *dharma* [of another kind] they will be reborn in the bad destinies, and [when] they pursue ten *dharma* [of yet a different kind] they will enter *nirvāṇa*.

The practice of which [kinds of] ten *dharma* will lead to rebirth in a bad destiny? As follows: There are people who kill what has life, steal, are licentious (commit adultery), tell lies, engage in idle talk, in harsh speech, in abusive talk, fight and argue with each other, are jealous, have anger and hate, and give rise to evil/wrong views. These are the ten [bad] *dharma*, and those beings who practice these ten *dharma* will enter the bad destinies.

As follows: There are people who do not kill, do not steal, are not licentious (do not commit adultery), do not tell lies, do not engage in idle talk, do not use harsh speech, do not engage in abusive talk, [or] in fighting with one another, are not jealous, do not have anger or hate, and do not give rise to evil/wrong views. If people practice these ten *dharma* they will be reborn in heaven.

Through the practice of which ten *dharma* can one obtain *nirvāṇa*? Through the ten remembrances: remembrance of the Buddha, remembrance of the teaching, remembrance of the monks’ community, remembrance of the gods, remembrance of the moral precepts, remembrance of generosity, remembrance of stopping [the mental activity] (念休息),¹⁵⁶ remembrance of breathing [techniques], remembrance of the body, and remembrance of death. Through the practice of those ten *dharma* one reaches *nirvāṇa*.¹⁵⁷

[...]

Now, we do have a parallel to this sūtra in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*.¹⁵⁸ In the Pāli version the Buddha teaches that those who possess the ten bad qualities will go to hell and those with the ten good qualities to heaven, but it lacks the third most important alternative found in the *Ekottarika-āgama*. It mentions no list of ten qualities or *dharma* that would lead to *nirvāṇa*.

156 The above passages had *xinian* (息念) and *nianzhiguan* (念止觀), whereas here we have *nian xiuxi* (念休息). All three terms refer to the effort of not letting thoughts arise in the mind.

157 T2, no. 125, p. 780c–781a.

158 *Aṅguttaranikāya* X. 210.

9.2. Passages from the *Ēkottarika-āgama* fully devoted to *buddhānusmṛti*

9.2.1. The largest *buddhānusmṛti* sūtra of the known *Āgama* and *Nikāya*

The next sūtra is the first sūtra of chapter three of the *Ēkottarika-āgama*. It is by far the most representative in *buddhānusmṛti* matters and even within the known *Āgama* and *Nikāya* material, as it gives the most detailed description of this practice. Surprisingly or not, it has no Pāli parallel. The sūtra was translated by Paul Harrison in the context of his groundbreaking study on *buddhānusmṛti* in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*.¹⁵⁹

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha resided at the *ārāma* of Anāthapiṇḍada in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time the Lord addressed the *bhikṣus*: ‘You should practice one dharma, you should propagate one dharma, and when you have practiced one dharma you shall have renown, achieve the great fruit, attain all good, acquire the taste of nectar [*amṛta*], and reach the station of the unconditioned; then you shall achieve magic power, eliminate distractions of thought, attain the fruit of the *śramaṇa*, and arrive at Nirvāṇa. What is the one dharma? Namely, *buddhānusmṛti*.’

The Buddha addressed the *bhikṣus*: ‘How does one practice *buddhānusmṛti*, so that one then has renown, achieves the great fruit, [...] and arrives at Nirvāṇa?’

[The *bhikṣus* entreat the Buddha to explain how.]

The Lord said: ‘A *bhikṣu* correct in body and correct in mind sits crosslegged and focuses his thought in front of him. Without entertaining any other thought he earnestly calls to mind [*anusmṛti*-] the Buddha. He contemplates the image of the Tathāgata without taking his eyes off it. Not taking his eyes off it he then calls to mind the qualities of the Tathāgata – the Tathāgata’s body made of *vajra*, endowed with the ten Powers [*bala*], and by virtue of the four Assurances [*vaiśāradya*] intrepid in assemblies; the Tathāgata’s countenance, upright and peerless, so that one never tires of beholding it; his perfection of the moral qualities [*śīla*] resembling *vajra* in indestructibility, like *vaiḍūrya* in flawless purity; the Tathāgata’s *samādhis* never diminishing, calm, ever tranquil, without any extraneous thought, having stilled arrogance, brutality, and the emotions, having eliminated thoughts of desire, of anger, of delusion, apprehension, and all meshes of the net; the Tathāgata’s body of wisdom [*prajñā*], its knowledge unlimited and unobstructed; the Tathāgata’s body perfected in liberation [*vimukti*], done with all destinies and no longer subject to rebirth with such words as: “I must again plunge into Samsāra!”; the Tathāgata’s body, a city of the knowledge and vision of liberation [*vimukti-jñāna-darśana*], knowing the faculties of others and whether or not they shall be liberated, whether, dying here, being reborn there, they shall go on revolving in Samsāra until Samsāra ends, knowing them all, those who possess liberation and those who do not.’

159 HARRISON, 1978: 37–38.

‘This is the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, by which one has renown, achieves the great fruit, [...] and arrives at Nirvāṇa. Therefore, *bhikṣus*, you should always meditate on, and never depart from, *buddhānusmṛti*; then you shall acquire these goodly qualities. Thus, *bhikṣus*, should you undertake this training.’

At that time the *bhikṣus*, hearing what the Buddha had expounded, accepted it with rejoicing.¹⁶⁰

9.2.2. *Buddhānusmṛti* as a means to praise the Buddha’s beauty

Further, at the end of the fourth scroll of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, we have another noteworthy sūtra that praises the Tathāgata’s beauty and qualities. We know of no parallel version for this sūtra either.

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at the Anāthapiṇḍada monastery in the Jetavana at Śrāvastī. At that time, the Bhagavat told the monks: ‘If a person appears in the world [belonging to] the kind of living beings [who have] an exceedingly extended lifespan,¹⁶¹ [and if he has] a shiny and smooth physical appearance¹⁶² and a vigorous physical strength, [radiating] infinite joy, [and possessing] a harmonious and refined voice, who is [such] a person? It is a Tathāgata who has reached *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*.¹⁶³ He is the one person appearing in the world [who belongs to] the kind of living beings [who have] an exceedingly extended lifespan. [He has] a shiny and smooth physical appearance and a vigorous physical strength. [He radiates] infinite joy [and possesses] a harmonious and refined voice. This is why, monks, you should always concentrate and devote yourselves single-mindedly to *buddhānusmṛti*. Monks, this is how you should undertake this training.’ When the monks heard what the Buddha had expounded, they rejoiced and put [his teaching] into practice.¹⁶⁴

9.2.3. The Vaṅḡsa story: *buddhānusmṛti* as a means to overcome erotic desires

Again a different sūtra of the *Ekottarika-āgama* narrates the story of the monk Vaṅḡsa’s sudden feelings of lust. The text has been preserved in a Pāli sūtra and in two further Chinese translations. The parallel versions will be discussed

160 T2, no. 125, p. 554a–b.

161 *Zeng shou liyi* (增壽益算). This reading is confirmed in T2, no. 125, p. 764b2 where the same formulation is used for a certain king who neither dies in the middle of his life, nor at a young age.

162 *Yan se guang run* (顏色光潤). This formulation is also seen in the Chinese *Dīrghāgama* (*Chang a han jing* 長阿含經, T1, no. 1, p. 147c29), also translated by Zhu Fonian, to contrast a ‘coarse or rough and pale physical appearance’: *yan se cu cui* (顏色羸悴).

163 *Zhen deng zhengjue* (真等正覺).

164 T2, no. 125, p. 566a.

afterwards, but we can anticipate that in comparison the *Vaṅgīsa-sūtra* of the *Ekottarika-āgama* is the longest and the most detailed:

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at the Veṇuvana-Kalandakanivāpa (bamboo park) at Rājagṛha¹⁶⁵ together with a great retinue of five hundred monks. [When] the time [for lunch arrives] Ānanda and Vaṅgīsa¹⁶⁶ put on their robes, take their bowls, and enter the town to beg for alms. At that time in an alley Vaṅgīsa sees an extremely attractive woman [of a beauty] unusual in the world. As soon as he sees her, his heart and mind become confused,¹⁶⁷ he is not the same as usual.¹⁶⁸

At that time Vaṅgīsa turns to Ānanda and tells him in a verse (*gāthā*): ‘The fire of lust is burning [me], my mind and will are extremely ablaze. Please explain the means by which to extinguish [this suffering], [means that] will be of great benefit.’¹⁶⁹

Ānanda then replies also in a *gāthā*: ‘Know that your desires are a perverted thing¹⁷⁰ that sets [your] mind and willpower on fire. You must get rid of these thoughts and recollections of her image, [then] your lustful mind will cease by itself.’

At that time, Vaṅgīsa replies again in a *gāthā*: ‘The heart is at the basis of the body [and] the eyes are at the origin of [this] situation. [When I] lie down and sleep [I] see [myself] holding [her], [but then her] body is like a messy [bunch] of withering grass.’¹⁷¹

The venerable Ānanda then immediately moves forwards and with his right hand caresses Vaṅgīsa’s head explaining in a *gāthā*: ‘Recall the Buddha [and you will] without avid desires surpass that lustful Nanda.¹⁷² Look at heaven and [imagine you could] end up in hell. Control your mind and you will get away from the five destinies.’¹⁷³

165 Luoyue *cheng* Jialantuo *zhuyuan* (羅閱城迦蘭陀竹園).

166 Duoqishe (多耆奢).

167 *Xinyi cuoluan* (心意錯亂). The phrase expresses that he felt strong desires for her.

168 *Bu yu chang tong* (不與常同).

169 知欲顛倒法 心意極熾然 當除想像念 欲意便自休 (T2, no. 125, p. 701a).

170 Lit. an upside down *dharma*: *diandao fa* (顛倒法).

171 The two *padas* are: 睡臥見扶接 形如亂草萎. If my understanding is correct Vaṅgīsa is saying that when asleep (or when lying down for sleep) he holds and embraces a nearby bush (in case he is sleeping outside) or that he embraces some bedding made or filled with grass, all this while imagining that it is a woman. As he is supposedly speaking this verse right after seeing the beautiful woman, he cannot have slept over this event yet. By these *padas* Vaṅgīsa probably makes it clear that he has been harbouring lustful feelings well before seeing that particular woman.

172 The *pada* is: *Du bi yu* Nantuo (度彼欲難陀). It is probably meant as an incitement to emulate and even exceed the monk Nanda / Nantuo (難陀), who reputedly was keenly interested in women at the beginning. Nanda is said to be the Buddha’s half-brother, the son of Mahā-prajāpati and of the Buddha’s father. At first he was in love with his bride whom he could not marry because the Buddha managed to convince him to become a monk shortly before his marriage. But Nanda retained lustful thoughts even after becoming a monk, and only

Vaṅgīsa asks Ānanda to stop talking and says he wishes to return to where the Bhagavat is. On their way back, however, the same woman sees Vaṅgīsa from afar and smiles at him. Vaṅgīsa sees the woman smiling, but now he only considers her body as bones and skin and sees her as a painted bottle filled with impurities. The sūtra continues with Vaṅgīsa pondering over the question where his desire has arisen from: from earth, water, fire or wind. He then understands that his desires only derive from his thoughts. He understands that he has made up everything in his thoughts and that the woman does not actually exist. He obtains release (*vimokṣa*).¹⁷⁴ And when he goes back to where the Buddha is, he tells him his attainments in prose and in verses. The Buddha compliments Vaṅgīsa and approves of his attainments saying that he is among the upper sixty disciples who have reached the state of having ended the impurities and liberated their minds. The sūtra ends with Vaṅgīsa rejoicing at the Buddha's words.

In his last attempt to rescue Vaṅgīsa from his burning desires Ānanda gives him the advice to practice *buddhānussmṛti*. Then Vaṅgīsa does indeed come to his senses, but his change might not be due to *buddhānussmṛti*. Firstly, he does not seem to follow Ānanda's advice, and, secondly, the events follow each other so closely that Vaṅgīsa had probably no time to focus on any particular practice. They again encounter the woman immediately after deciding to go back to their dwelling place. The text does not mention why, all of a sudden, Vaṅgīsa changes his attitude and his view regarding that woman, why he does not appreciate her beauty anymore when he sees her the second time, and instead merely considers her composite, impermanent and impure nature. Thus, regarding the appearance of *buddhānussmṛti* in this text, all we can say is that Ānanda mentions it in a verse, but that it need not necessarily be meant as the cause of Vaṅgīsa's change of attitude and conduct as described in this text. The change might rather be associated with the effects of *marañānussmṛti* (commemoration of death).

In any case, the Pāli version of this sūtra does not mention *buddhānussmṛti*.¹⁷⁵ There, Ānanda advises Vaṅgīsa to focus his mind and thoughts on the impure nature of the human body, i.e., on its disgusting aspects. He also advises him to calm down his mind and to cultivate a detached attitude with regard to the

after several incidents and hard practice he freed himself from his obsessive desires. Later, Nanda was considered the foremost disciple in self-control. For Nanda, see AKANUMA, 1967: 443–444, and MALALASEKERA, 1997: 10–11.

173 T2, no. 125, p. 701a12–29. To get away from the five destinies, means to reach *nirvāṇa*.

174 *Jietuo* (解脱).

175 *Samyuttanikāya* VIII, *Ānandasutta* 4.

body. The course of events is similar to the one told in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, but the narration is much shorter. Interestingly, Vaṅgīsa has sudden feelings of lust and desire, but no woman is mentioned. In the Pāli version there is neither an encounter with a woman, nor does Vaṅgīsa get to see one. Also, the interaction between the two monks is less extensive: Vaṅgīsa speaks out his problem and Ānanda replies, but we are not told how Vaṅgīsa reacts to Ānanda's advice and there is no subsequent talk with the Buddha either.

The two Chinese *Samyuktāgama* collections each contain one version of this sūtra.¹⁷⁶ Neither of them mentions *buddhānusmṛti*. Both versions have a similar form and structure as the Pāli sūtra and both are shorter than the *Ekottarika-āgama* version. The difference between the two Chinese versions and the Pāli is that they both mention the actual event that causes so much trouble to Vaṅgīsa,¹⁷⁷ namely, that he sees a beautiful young woman. After Vaṅgīsa's first call for help (in the form of a verse), Ānanda replies in a few verses suggesting he should calm his mind and focus his attention on his body and understand that it is due to the body's disgusting or detestable aspects that one is reborn after death in bad destinies, and that by correctly viewing or understanding the body one can get rid of its detestable consequences. In both versions Ānanda urges Vaṅgīsa to get rid of his pride and torpor.¹⁷⁸ In the first version he suggests that this can be done through the study and correct understanding of the fact that everything is without marks.¹⁷⁹ In the second version Vaṅgīsa should practice and study the correct perfect wisdom¹⁸⁰ to attain this goal. An interesting although minor difference is that in the second version Ānanda recommends that Vaṅgīsa should spend some time somewhere alone in seated meditation.¹⁸¹

As recalling the Buddha is said to help acquire good qualities or overcome fear, it is also believed to help overcome sexual desires, and, as the following text will show, it is even recommended before death to ease the pains and anguish related to it.

176 The first version is found in the *Za ahan jing* (雜阿含經), T2, no. 99, p. 331a–b, and the second in the *Bieyi za ahan jing* (別譯雜阿含經, T2, no. 100, p. 458a–b).

177 Vaṅgīsa's name is written Duoqishe (多耆奢) in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, Poqishe (婆耆舍) in the first *Samyuktāgama* version and Poqishe (婆耆奢) as well as Poqi (婆耆) in the second *Samyuktāgama* version.

178 *Jiao man* (嬌慢) or *man* (慢).

179 *Wu xiang* (無相), Sanskrit *alakṣaṇa* or *animitta*, refers to the core doctrinal point of Buddhism that everything is without self-nature, and neither independent, nor permanent.

180 *Zheng zhihui* (正智慧).

181 *Du chu er zuochan* (獨處而坐禪).

9.2.4. *Buddhānusmṛti* at Anāthapiṇḍada's death bed

A full account on the events surrounding Anāthapiṇḍada's death-bed has survived in a sūtra of the *Ekottarika-āgama*,¹⁸² in the *Anāthapiṇḍikovāda-sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, as well as in several partial versions.¹⁸³ In the *Ekottarika-āgama* version the Buddha is staying at Śrāvastī. At that time the famous layman Anāthapiṇḍada (Anāthapiṇḍika in Pāli) is extremely ill and Śāriputra by his divine supernatural eye sees that Anāthapiṇḍada is enduring much suffering. He tells Ānanda: "You should go to Anāthapiṇḍada's place and inquire about his health." Ānanda replied: "[You] truly know when it is the right time." He takes his alms bowl and enters Śrāvastī to beg for alms. Then, he arrives at Anāthapiṇḍada's home and takes a seat. Śāriputra is already seated there and says to Anāthapiṇḍada: "Is the illness you have increasing and harmful, or do you notice that the pain is gradually decreasing?" Anāthapiṇḍada confirms the gravity of the situation and expresses his worries that his illness is not decreasing but increasing.

At this point the Pāli version has a detailed and long explanation on the pains he is experiencing. Thereupon, Śāriputra gives him a long and detailed instruction about clinging neither to the senses nor to the sense organs, etc.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version, Śāriputra first tells him at length to recall the Buddha *yi fo* (憶佛), the *dharma*, and the *saṃgha* who is accomplished in teaching, morality (*śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā*), liberation (*vimokṣa*), as well as knowledge of *vimokṣa*. He explains that the Tathāgata's *saṃgha* is worthy of veneration and the unsurpassable field of merit / luck (*punyaḥkṣetra*) in the world:

Sir, if you practice commemoration of the Buddha, commemoration of the dharma and commemoration of the monks' community, the virtue / benefit [from this] is immeasurable: at the end of [your] life, [you will] obtain the sweet dew (*amṛta*) of liberation.¹⁸⁵ If good men or good women remember the three honourable [refuges], i.e. the Buddha, the dharma, and the community, they will not at the end of [their] lives fall into the three bad realms of

182 T2, no. 125, p. 819b–820c.

183 For the main Pāli version and its comparative analysis see ANĀLAYO, 2011: 821–825. For the partial versions see *ibid.* p. 821, n. 3.

184 *Ibid.* p. 822.

185 *Huo ganlu mie jin zhi chu* (獲甘露滅盡之處). Note that this is a rather common metaphor used for *nirvāṇa*, or for the 'means leading to *nirvāṇa*'.

existence. If good men or good women remember the three honourable [refuges] they will without fail [be reborn] in a good place, in heaven or among the humans.¹⁸⁶

Of interest for the present study is the fact that the other versions do not say that one can escape the bad destinies and be reborn in heaven by means of commemorations in general, or of the Buddha commemoration in particular. Also, in the *Ēkottarika-āgama* version, Śāriputra ends his teaching by saying that the practice of emptiness is the foremost *dharma* (teaching point).¹⁸⁷

9.2.5. The *Dharmacaitya Sūtra*

and the commemoration of the Tathāgata's virtues

In the *Dharmacaitya Sūtra* the Buddha asks king Prasenajit his reasons for paying his respects to the Buddha. The king's answer forms the core section of this sūtra that has come down to us in several versions in Pāli, Gāndhārī, Chinese, and Tibetan. The version of the *Ēkottarika-āgama* has only one reason (no. 4) that corresponds to one of the points mentioned in the other versions.¹⁸⁸ The *Ēkottarika-āgama* version goes as follows:

The king says to the Buddha: "The Tathāgata possesses six virtues for which he should receive the people's worship, namely: (1) the sublime teaching of the Buddha; (2) the accomplishment of his noble disciples [...]; (3) the existence of four assemblies of [diligently] practicing disciples [...],¹⁸⁹ (4) the Buddha's power in explaining the dharma in such a way that disputants (of other religions), when they hear him, will never again want to ask something, and even less to argue, and will all take the Tathāgata as their master / teacher, (5) the Buddha's overcoming of the sixty-two views [...], (6) if those living beings whose bodily, oral and mental deeds are bad, commemorate the Tathāgata's virtues¹⁹⁰ when their lives end, they will stay away from the three bad destinies and obtain a rebirth in heaven. [The Tathāgata can] correctly make a very bad person obtain rebirth in heaven. This is the Tathāgata's sixth virtue."¹⁹¹

186 T2, no. 125, p. 819b29–819c4.

187 *Mingwei kong xing di yi zhi fa* (名為空行第一之法), T2, no. 125, 819c24.

188 Among these the Pāli *Dhammacetiya-sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* / *Zhong a han jing* (中阿含經), T1, no. 26, p. 458b–461b), translated by Saṃghadeva in the last years of the 4th century CE., and an account handed down in the Chinese and Tibetan *Vinayaśūdrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. For further details see ANĀLAYO, 2011: 512–513.

189 See note 340 in ANĀLAYO, 2011: 512–513.

190 *Yi rulai gong de* (憶如來功德).

191 T2, no. 125, p. 725a10–b2.

To sum up, the Tathāgata's sixth virtue consists in allowing one to obtain rebirth in heaven by recalling his virtues. The text does not say whether the virtues to be recalled are the other five virtues, or this particular virtue that enables one to obtain a good rebirth. The Tathāgata's virtue or virtues are thus so great that their benefit is extended to others if only they commemorate them. We certainly have here evidence of a particular kind of 'transfer of merit'.

Part III: The transition from *buddhānusmṛti* to *samādhi*

10. *The tie between buddhānusmṛti and buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*

10.1. A note on concentration (*samādhi*) versus meditation (*dhyāna*)

The *samādhi* on *buddhānusmṛti* (or related to it) is a particular kind of (meditation like) concentration in which the practitioner focuses on the commemoration of the Buddha(s) during his practice. As we have seen in the above-mentioned extracts from the *Traité*, there is a strong link between *namo buddhāya* and *buddhānusmṛti*. But there also exists a strong connection between *buddhānusmṛti* and *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*.

There are several terms in Indic languages referring to concentration and meditation. Broadly defined: *samādhi* (as well as *samāpatti*) can be rendered into English as 'concentration',¹⁹² and *dhyāna* as 'meditation'.¹⁹³ Depending on the category of texts, however, this distinction is not so clear. Moreover, in Chinese translations, it becomes rather blurred. In general *samādhi* is transcribed as *sanmei* (三昧) and can be rendered as 'concentration', *dhyāna* is transcribed and abridged as *chan* (禪) or translated as *ding* (定) and can be rendered as 'meditation'. There are however numerous exceptions to this. A look at the Chinese translations of the *Āgama* literature shows that there are also expressions that combine the two, such as: *sanmei chan* (三昧禪) or *sanmei ding* (三昧定). There are also many other unusual renderings, such as, for example:

192 A further Indic term that is used in the sense of 'concentration' is *samāpatti*. According to EDGERTON, 1993: 569, these two words (*samādhi* and *samāpatti*) are fundamentally and substantially identical in meaning. He suggests that the attempts to differentiate them are scholastic pedantry.

193 Mostly *dhyāna* comes in a series of four meditations that are in mutual hierarchical order and related to higher realms.

sanmei nian (三昧念). Without going into details: whereas *dhyāna* meditations are of a more serious, conservative and rigidly ordered kind, the countless *samādhi* concentrations are more imaginative. Especially in scriptures of *mahāyāna* orientation the concentrations may indeed have fanciful names. As an example a list from a *mahāyāna* sūtra that only survived in Chinese translation:

the *samādhi* of hearing emptiness, the *samādhi* of the essence of awakening, the *samādhi* of the highest truth, the *samādhi* of the king of empty space, the *samādhi* of the end of a beginner's study, the *samādhi* of obtaining the essence, the *samādhi* of walking [on] the steps [of the Buddha] (i.e. of following his steps), the *samādhi* of subduing the devil / evil one, the *samādhi* of getting rid of dirt, and thousands of billions of *nayutas* of [other] *samādhi* like these.¹⁹⁴

These concentrations are mentioned by Mañjuśrī in his request to the Buddha, to (please) expound the unbelievable teaching(s) and all sorts of *samādhi*. In any case, since there is no such concept as a *buddhānusmṛti-dhyāna*, the present paper can only discuss issues related to *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*.

10.2. The *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* and other concentrations similar in kind

Here is an extract of the above quote from the *Traité*: “If by the [mere] commemoration of the Buddha, [one] can remove heavy sins and get help in [the case of] great danger, all the more [can one do so by] the concentration on Buddha commemoration.”¹⁹⁵

In fact, the studies conducted in modern times on the early history of Buddha commemoration all underpin its pivotal role for the later forms of devotions as well as for the increasingly sophisticated concentrations (*samādhi*), more and more focused on the encounter with the Buddha, a particular Buddha or the Buddhas.

Among the most groundbreaking studies of the last decades in this field is the study of the *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* by Paul Harrison,¹⁹⁶ in the course of which he also investigated sūtras from the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*. The *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* is about the ‘Samādhi

194 Translated from the *Womb Sūtra* / the *Pusa chutai jing* (菩薩處胎經), T12, no. 384, p. 1015c18–21. See LEGITTIMO, 2005 for the *Womb Sūtra*.

195 Translated from the Chinese (T25, no. 1509, p. 109a24–25): 以念佛故、能除重罪濟諸苦厄、何況念佛三昧。

196 HARRISON, 1978 and 1990. Another recent study on this topic by the same author deals with commemoration and identification in *buddhānusmṛti* (HARRISON, 1992).

of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present'.¹⁹⁷ This scripture proves to be at a foundational or seminal stage in relation to the later kinds of Buddha commemoration practices, such as, for example, those developed in the Pure Land traditions of the Far East. But it also proves that in the early and middle phases of *mahāyāna* there was a general interest in concentrations focusing on the encounter with the Buddhas. This scripture is, of course, not the only evidence for this. There are numerous texts of obvious *mahāyāna* inclination that encourage and praise the bodhisattvas for practicing a concentration (*samādhi*) that is named after the commemoration of the Buddha (*buddhānusmṛti*): the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*. The particularity of the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* is that it blends, as skilfully as its authors could contrive, elements from several early *mahāyāna* currents, such as the theory of emptiness as it is commonly found in *prajñāpāramitā* texts.

Other scriptures that follow at least partly a similar aim bear in their titles the particular *samādhi* on Buddha commemoration, for example: the *Sūtra on the Bodhisattvas' Concentration on Buddha Commemoration* (T414),¹⁹⁸ and the *Section of the Bodhisattvas' Concentration on Buddha Commemoration* of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* (T415),¹⁹⁹ two parallel versions of a scripture that has only survived in Chinese translation. In the *Taishō* edition, both these scriptures are included right before the Chinese translations of the above-mentioned *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtras* (T416–419). Of the latter scripture, four Chinese translations have been handed down to the present day, a fact that truly demonstrates its wide circulation and importance, also for the East.²⁰⁰

By chance, the reception of the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* in China has left clear traces. This particular concentration must have given no little perplexity to those whose attention was drawn to it. Thus, in the first decade of the 5th century the Buddhist Chinese monk Huiyuan (慧遠) had a written exchange with

197 English translation of the title of the sūtra as given by HARRISON.

198 The *Pusa nian fo sanmei jing* (菩薩念佛三昧經) in five scrolls, T13, no. 414, p. 793a–829c, tr. by Gongdezhi (功德直), of Western origin, around the middle of the 5th century.

199 The *Dafangdeng daji jing pusa nianfo sanmei fen* (大方等大集經菩薩念佛三昧分) in ten scrolls, T13, no. 415, p. 830a–871c, tr. by the Indian Dharmagupta / Damojiduo (達磨笈多) between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century. Note that this is not the known, large *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sūtra collection (T13, no 397), but a single long sūtra. Note also that none of the seventeen sections of the known, large *Mahāsaṃnipāta*, the *Large Collection of Sūtras* is called 'the bodhisattvas' *buddhānusmṛti* concentration' or similar. Thus, the scripture is most probably without parallel version.

200 For T13, no. 416–419 see the catalogue by DEMIÉVILLE et al., 1978.

the great Kumārājīva, asking him for help regarding those issues, which based on his own studies of the scriptures, he did not yet fully grasp. During their written exchange, the two men discuss a dozen topics, among them, the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*.²⁰¹

10.3. An example of *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* from the Chinese Canon and its quote

Of a particular interest is the *Sūtra on the Ocean-like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha* (T643).²⁰² This text mentions *buddhānusmṛti* and *namo buddhāya*, in the same passage. The Buddha tells the story of how a prince is converted to Buddhism by following a monk's advice to recite *namo buddhāya* within the precincts of a *stūpa*. In the following night the prince is able to see the Buddha and after a long and happy life the prince travels around the universe from one Buddha place to another as it is often said of bodhisattvas. He proceeds so far in his practice that he is able to dwell in a very deep concentration called the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*. At the end of the story the 'plain' *buddhānusmṛti* is also mentioned. For the authors of this scripture *namo buddhāya* is the simplest form of worship or remembrance of the Buddha, it represents a beginning stage, which does of course not mean that this practice would / should be abandoned in more advanced stages. *Buddhānusmṛti*, and even more so *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, are more elaborate forms of Buddha worship that may require certain instructions. The practice in these cases can start with *namo buddhāya*, but the practitioner aims at reaching more advanced states / levels, such as the 'Buddha remembrance concentration' (*buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*).

Furthermore, a text of the Chinese canonical tantric section, the *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī* (1336),²⁰³ quotes from the following passage of the

201 There is a Japanese study that discusses the written exchange of questions and answers that took place between the engaged Chinese monk and the famous Indic master Kumārājīva (TAMAKI, 1980). A few years ago, a further study investigated the question whether Huiyuan might not have been a Pure Land Buddhist, based on the evidence that in his exchanges with Kumārājīva he did inquire about the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* (JONES, 2008).

202 The *Guanfo sanmei hai jing* (觀佛三昧海經), T15, no. 643, p. 689a22–689b10, tr. by Buddhahadra / Fotuobatuoluo (佛陀跋陀羅). For an in-depth study of this scripture see YAMABE, 1999.

203 The *Tuoluoni zaji* (陀羅尼雜集), T21, no. 1336, p. 633a, tr. by an anonymous translator in the first half of the 6th century.

Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra (T643):²⁰⁴ Whereas a *śrāvaka* may focus on all sorts of topics and breathing techniques, etc. [...]

there are only four teachings a bodhisattva [needs to worry about]: to recite his sins and repent them all the time, to practice Buddha commemoration permanently without deceiving people, to practice the six ‘harmonious and respectful states of mind’²⁰⁵ without hatred or torpor, and to practice the six commemorations as if he had to save his burning head (*ādīptaśira-upama*).²⁰⁶

The *Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra* is, moreover, one of the few scriptures within the Chinese Canon that mentions a notion that reached a further stage of ideational development: the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha*, which will be discussed hereafter.

11. The doorways to the ‘concentration on Buddha commemoration’ (Buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha)

11.1. A note on the concentration doorways (*samādhi-mukha*)

Buddhist communities of *mahāyāna* stratum developed the idea that there are particular methods, approaches, doorways or gates (*mukha*) to particular genres of concentrations. As is also known from other topics, Buddhist scriptures display, among other things, the ingenious minds and resourcefulness of their compilers (or authors). Dozens of texts enjoy hundreds of mentions of such ‘doorways to concentration’.²⁰⁷ While the texts do mention particular concentration doorways (by their names), they also say that there are 10, 80, 500, 10’000, 20’000, 30’000, 35’000, 40’000, 60’000, 72’000, 84’000, 100’000, or countless such doorways, depending on which text we look at. Many scriptures in a condensed way simply say ‘all the *samādhi-mukha*’. What the all-inclusive and universal *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (version in 80 scrolls) says in this respect is of a

204 Original: T15, no. 643, p. 682b–c, quote translated from: T21, no. 1336, p. 633a.

205 *He* (or: *hu*, *huo*, *han*) *jīng xīn* (和敬心). Probably from Sanskrit *sāmīcī* (respectful attitude, propriety of conduct and conformity to the ideal) or *saṃrañjanīya* (conforming to sociable [companionable, pleasing, friendly] principles [of conduct]). See HIRAKAWA, 1997: 253, and EDGERTON, 1993: 539 / 592.

206 *Ru jiu tou ran* (如救頭然). The better known Sanskrit formula is: *ādīptaśiraścailopama*, see footnote no. 3 in LAMOTTE, vol. III, 1970: 1198.

207 *Samādhi-mukha* / *sanmei men* (三昧門).

particular interest: when the bodhisattva “enters through one concentration doorway, he enters countless concentration doorways, and knows all about all the concentration spheres and about all the concentrations [...]”²⁰⁸ Certain of those texts saying ‘all the *samādhi-mukha*’, especially those of *prajñāpāramitā* affiliation, also refer in the same breath to ‘all the *dhāraṇī-mukha*’.

Within the *Āgama* scriptures extant in Chinese translation, the new emerging concept of *samādhi-mukha* is, as one may expect, very rare. Only one *Āgama* scripture takes notice of this concept, a sūtra of the *Samyukta-āgama*.²⁰⁹

11.2. The *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha*

While the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* enjoyed an ever-increasing popularity and conveyance, a doorway for that particular concentration was also envisaged, namely, the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha*.²¹⁰ Literally the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* relates to the methods / means to enter into the particular concentration related to Buddha commemoration. Within the Chinese Canon, only (or at least) three scriptures bring up this concept, the *Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra* (T643) being one of them.²¹¹ The other two scriptures that went (according to the Chinese Canon), so far as to discuss the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* are the previously mentioned *Great Sūtra Collection of Extended Sūtras* (T415),²¹² and the ‘*Gaṇḍavyūha* chapter’ of the [*Buddha*]-*Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (T279: version in 60 scrolls).²¹³

The *Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra* (T643) has ten scrolls. The particular ‘Buddha commemoration concentration doorway’ is mentioned towards the end of its last scroll – only once – in a passage in which the Buddha supposedly entrusts the very sūtra to Ānanda:

208 Translated from the Chinese [*Buddha*]-*Avataṃsaka-sūtra* / *Dafang guang fo huayan jing* (大方廣佛華嚴經), T10, 279, p. 97b, tr. by Śikṣānanda / Shichanantuo (實叉難陀) between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 8th century.

209 ‘Sūtra no. 119’ of the *Separate translation of the Samyuktāgama* / *Bieyi za ahan jing* (別譯雜阿含經), T2, no.100, 418c17 and 21. This is the second (anonymous) translation of this collection into Chinese.

210 *Nianfo sanmei men* (念佛三昧門).

211 T15, no. 643, p. 696b26.

212 T13, no. 415, p. 864a.

213 The *Dafang guang fo huayan jing* (大方廣佛華嚴經), T9, no. 278, p. 689c–690b. Note that this translation is different from T9, no. 279, and that it was translated by the same Buddhahadra who also translated the *Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra*.

This sūtra is called ‘taking into custody and consideration the unmovable’ (?),²¹⁴ you should keep it [in memory] like this, it is also called ‘seeing the Buddhas’ white hair mark’,²¹⁵ you should keep it [in memory] like this, it is also called [...] (follow the names related to the Tathāgata’s body) [...] It is also called *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha*. It is also called ‘wonderful and glorious majesty of the physical bodies of all the Buddhas’. [...]²¹⁶

The doorway in question thus serves to underline the importance of the scripture, and is used towards the end of the scripture for reasons of safeguarding the scripture, following the *mahāyāna* trend commonly known as ‘the cult of the book’. Vice versa, the fact that it is used for that purpose suggests that *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* was considered an important doorway by the compilers / authors of the text.

‘The Section (i.e., the sūtra) of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* on the *Bodhisattvas’ Concentration on Buddha Commemoration*’ also mentions this particular doorway once and calls it ‘the king [among the] concentrations’,²¹⁷ saying that it is so powerful that if good men and women only hear about it, they should know that this will not [just] be a seed of little merit (lit. luck) [that plants] a few good roots (*kuśalamūla*).²¹⁸ They must know that they will immediately be completed ‘bodhisattva-path’ persons.²¹⁹ This explanation is part of a series of explanations propounded by the Buddha to a bodhisattva called ‘seeing the non-empty’.²²⁰

The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* has the doorway in its chapter on the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.²²¹ The text knows a whole range of *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha*. Actually it is able to distinguish twenty of them, listing them with their particular names and the effects they produce. The text says that these *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* are part of the perfectly pure practice of all the great bodhisattvas. To mention but two examples: (5) When [a bodhisattva] obtains the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* of the analysis²²² of all the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, he can see, in the midst of the ocean(s) of all the worlds, the

214 *Ci jing ming ji xiang budong* (此經名繫想不動).

215 One of the thirty-two marks of a great being for which see footnote no. 6.

216 Translation from the Chinese. T15, no. 643, p. 696b.

217 *Ci sanmei wang* (此三昧王).

218 *Shangen* (善根).

219 *Juzu pusa sheng zhe* (具足菩薩乘者). The ‘vehicle of the bodhisattvas’ is but another name here for the ‘great vehicle’ (*mahāyāna*).

220 *Bu kong jian* (不空見).

221 *Ru fajie pin* (入法界品), the chapter on the *Entrance into the Dharma Realm*.

222 *Fenbie* (分別): analysis or critical distinction, and in this sense also ‘critical understanding’ or differentiation.

ocean(s) of all the Tathāgatas, and (6) When [the great bodhisattva] obtains the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi-mukha* that can neither be seen nor entered, he sees all the Buddhas' spheres of freedom in the subtle spheres.²²³

12. *Correlation between buddhānusmṛti-samādhi and samādhi*

12.1. Lack of connection between *samādhi* and *buddhānusmṛti* in the early scriptures

Regarding *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, we can assume that it enjoyed an increasing popularity from a certain time onwards, as we have no trace of it in the early scriptures. This, although *buddhānusmṛti* (by itself) was certainly popular long before *samādhi* came into vogue. A certain '*samādhi* trend' generated concentrations on all sorts of doctrinal and practice-related teachings. As an important and versatile tenet, *buddhānusmṛti* was accordingly further developed into a concentration aiming at seeing the Buddha(s).

Certainly, the *Ekottarika-āgama* bears many imprints of both *buddhānusmṛti* and *samādhi*, although it does so in a yet unentangled way. It does not yet know the *samādhi* on *buddhānusmṛti*, but it knows a considerable set of other *samādhi*.

12.2. Concentrations (*samādhi*) appearing in the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*²²⁴

The following list gives about half of the concentrations mentioned in the *Ekottarika-āgama*. The other half has been left out here to avoid anticipating the investigations in progress. One thing that can be said beforehand about all the concentrations of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, is that none of them relates directly to the Buddha, to his virtues or to his physical merits. We do not find on the basis of the concentrations of this collection any proof of a shift from the traditional concentration or meditation topics to those that are based on an already well

223 得不可見不可入念佛三昧門、於微細境界、見一切佛自在境界 (T9, no. 278, p. 690a). *Zizai jing* (自在) meaning freedom, autonomy, and the state of being without exterior constraint or enforcement.

224 A paper on "Meditations and Meditative Practices according to the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*" that will include the translations of the relevant material is in preparation by the present author.

established stage of apotheosis, as found in those scriptures of undeniably *mahāyāna* current.

the water *samādhi*
 the water nature (humidity) *samādhi*
 the water light *samādhi*
 the fire *samādhi*
 the fire light *samādhi*
 the increased blaze *samādhi*
 the golden light *samādhi*
 the all day light *samādhi*
 the blaze light *samādhi*
 the flames light *samādhi*
 the thunderbolt *samādhi*
 the *vajra* (diamond / thunderbolt) *samādhi*²²⁵

From the selection of concentrations indicated above, we see that in the *Ekottarika-āgama* there is no redirection of the thematic focus from ‘elementary meditation topics’ (water, fire, etc.) to the Buddha, to Buddha worlds, Buddha virtues and qualities, as seen in certain later texts. But the partial list does nevertheless hint at a mystifying and glorifying (background) process that found its way into the collection, more or less inconspicuously in the form of an increasing orientation towards light. Certain of the *Ekottarika-āgama*’s *samādhi* bearing this ‘light feature’ seem to be missing from other *Āgama* and *Nikaya* scriptures.

13. *The role of samādhi in mahāyāna Buddhism*

Whereas the *Āgama* and *Nikaya* literature has a fundamental liking for meditations (*dhyāna*), the development of increasingly complicated forms (and names) of concentrations (*samādhi*) can be seen as one of the numerous characteristics of ideational developments that from a certain time onwards were termed as *mahāyāna* (great vehicle). Now, although the *Ekottarika-āgama* does bear certain (commemorative) features that might hint to a *mahāyāna*

225 *Shui sanmei* (水三昧), *Shui qi sanmei* (水氣三昧), *Shui guang sanmei* (水光三昧), *Huo sanmei* (火三昧), *Huo guang sanmei* (火光三昧), *Yan cheng / sheng sanmei* (焰盛三昧), *Jin guang sanmei* (金光三昧), *Xi ri guang sanmei* (習日光三昧), *Yan guang sanmei* (焰光三昧), *Yan guang sanmei* (炎光三昧), *Lei dian sanmei* (雷電三昧), *Jin gang sanmei* (金剛三昧).

(background) influence at a certain stage of its transmission, or to certain aspects that could have served as seeds for further developments, there is little tangible evidence for a general shift to *mahāyāna* doctrinal stances. At least, judging on the basis of its use and mention of *anusmṛti* and *samādhi*, it does not blend these two as skilfully as later texts.

Whereas certain later sūtra bear titles that directly refer to a *samādhi* related to Buddha commemoration, another set of scriptures refer in their titles to the result of the concentration they teach: the encounter with the Buddhas of the present.²²⁶ Yet other texts introduce a teaching related to a particular concentration that is set in a context in which the Buddha has been fully apotheosized and is a transcendental entity.²²⁷ Similar to these scriptures that each have a particular view to offer, many more texts are still waiting their turn to be investigated.

In early sixth century China, literally dozens of sūtra were in circulation, bearing the name of a specific *samādhi* in their titles.²²⁸ Furthermore, over a dozen larger sūtras had chapters called by the name of a particular *samādhi*.²²⁹ This data is drawn from the oldest existing catalogue of Buddhist scriptures, composed in the year 515.²³⁰

New forms of meditation practices and techniques, different from the traditional *dhyāna* meditations, emerged around the first century C.E., and less than four centuries later these passed the doorway to China. Most of the *samādhi* scriptures listed in the aforementioned catalogue were known in China before the end of the fourth century C.E.²³¹

This phenomenon, namely, the proliferation of ‘concentration sūtras’, demands an explanation. A preliminary study on meditation and the beginnings of *mahāyāna* Buddhism by Florin Deleanu argues with good reason that the unprecedented visions of those emerging from meditations (or concentrations)

226 See the research on the *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra* by HARRISON, 1978 / 1990 / 1992.

227 See the research on the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi-Sūtra* by LAMOTTE, 1975.

228 [X] concentration sūtra: [X] *sanmei jing* ([X] 三昧經). Some of these sūtra circulated alternatively by a shortcut title that included only the name of the *samādhi* without explicitly mentioning ‘*sanmei*’ in its title.

229 Chapter on [X] concentration: [X] *sanmei pin* ([X] 三昧品).

230 The *Chu san zang ji ji* (出三藏記集), T55, no. 2145, composed by Seng You (僧祐), 445–518.

231 The *Chu san zang ji ji* draws information from various older, presently lost bibliographies (text lists), such as for example from the *Zong li zhong jing mu lu* (總理衆經目錄), the first truly critical catalogue compiled in 374 by Dao An (道安), 314–385.

might in return have influenced such ideational factors as the cosmological premises for meditation and the modes of salvation, and could be at least partly responsible for the drastic increase of a literary genre, within the later Buddhist canon, that could be termed ‘meditational’:

Many of the earliest mahāyāna communities started perhaps as ‘fundamentalist’ groups rather than revolutionary and populist fraternities. [...] fundamentalism is never a return to a perfectly reconstructable pristine Teaching of a founder. It is usually a blend of more or less dim knowledge of the early doctrines with a great deal of interpretation and agendas meant to serve contemporary needs. The earliest mahāyāna Buddhists had the fundamentalist goal of returning to the very roots.²³²

A similar train of thought can also be followed regarding the less perceptible, minor changes that occurred whenever Buddhist faith and practice were ‘restored’, also in *Āgama* literature. Little by little, changes and innovations found their way into the oldest strata of Buddhist canonical literature, changes that probably occurred without anyone ever hoping that they would get identified or labelled.

The gradual rise of mahāyāna from within the traditional *saṅgha* can explain the doctrinal continuities between the two movements. [...] The hypothesis of a gradual formation of the new movement can also better explain why in spite of its general tone of self-glorification the literature of the new movement (the author is referring to *prajñāpāramitā* literature) contains many passages which strike a note of conciliation with the Śrāvakayāna ideals. [...] the new agenda is not carried out at the expense of completely denying the old tradition.²³³

Although the author is arguing here from the point of view of an early *mahāyāna* scripture, some of his arguments are valid also when the same questions are asked from the point of view of an ‘evolved’ or ‘restored’ *Āgama* collection such as the *Ekottarika-āgama*. Evolution and restoration are often two facets of one and the same phenomenon. Religious scriptures, oral as well as written, are alive as long as they belong to a living tradition – with all the imperceptibles. In any case, the Buddhist schools did neither evolve in the same ways, nor at the same pace.

Most of the studies completed in recent years on issues and texts related to early *mahāyāna* currents, while highlighting a particular aspect of *mahāyāna*, agree that its process of formation was slow, smooth and heterogeneous, rather

232 DELEANU, 1999: 86–87.

233 DELEANU, 1999: 81.

than uniform or singular, and that it did not appear at once.²³⁴ This generally accepted scholarly position allows due consideration of the multilayered and versatile nature of Buddhist traditions, texts and practices.

The Buddhist traditions were multiple and more or less congruent in their teachings, and the *Ekottarika-āgama* despite its fifty-one scrolls, offers but a glimpse into one of the ancient traditions, a yet unaffiliated one. But even when it comes to the meditation practices of other traditions, there exist several contradictory factors, some of which are rightly brought up for discussion by Johannes Bronkhorst in the conclusion of a study on self and meditation in Indian Buddhism.

[...] reflection can be made when it comes to self and meditation in Buddhism. It seems certain that the Buddha never preached knowledge of the self as essential for reaching liberation. Yet his followers introduced this notion, first in a roundabout way, later directly in such forms as the *tathāgatagarbha*. With regard to meditation we can be sure that the Buddha taught some kind of meditation — the four *dhyānas* to be precise — as preliminary stages to the psychological transformation that constituted the aim of his teachings. His followers, once again, introduced other forms of meditation which had little to do with this psychological transformation, and much more with the originally non-Buddhist aim of immobilising the mind.²³⁵

Not only regarding the earlier *dhyāna* meditations and the later so called *mahāyāna* meditations, but also in the case of the *Ekottarika-āgama* stories related to recitation, commemoration of the Buddha, as well as to concentrations (*samādhi*), it seems rather certain that some of the key concepts of their narratives may never have been spoken by the Buddha, and they are of great relevance for the understanding of the early and middle phases of Buddhist ideational developments: they tell the success and failure stories of Buddhist innovations and restorations.

14. *Conclusions*

Although the investigated sources are all textual sources, we find in the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* Buddha statues and images in relation to ‘good men and good

234 For a different view, see for example the introduction to the *Rāṣṭrapāla Sūtra* in BOUCHER, 2008, in which the author proposes that *mahāyāna* might have become a pan-Indian phenomenon in a short time span.

235 BRONKHORST, 1998: 159.

women'.²³⁶ The '*Five Merits Sūtra*' says that a person gains merit if, when seeing an image of the Buddha, he: (1) feels delighted, (2) recites three times '*namo tathāgatāya*', (3) makes great donations, scatters flowers, burns incense, and makes offerings, and (4) venerates the Buddha's body with a pure mind, kneeling down with folded hands. And (5) after death, thanks to the Buddhist (permanent) teachings, he is to be reborn in a good place. The last point might have been listed to persuade the laity about the compelling evidence of these teachings, as they are supposedly part of the Buddha's permanent teachings, and to convey the idea of a kind of 'transfer of merit'. Although the teaching is delivered following the numerical and stereotyped structure typical of an *Ekottarika-āgama* sūtra, the content is not so common. Firstly, it only speaks about worship and Buddha veneration performed in front of images and Buddha bodies, secondly, the goals are of an un-Buddhistic nature, at least not of a clerical one. Why should a monk ponder about obtaining a lovely voice or physical beauty? Traditionally, a monk is supposed to be interested in those teachings that lead to *nirvāṇa*. And thirdly, the categories are mixed up and the group of five is fictive: points one to four are virtues or good deeds, whereas number five refers to a good retribution.

Issues related to the dichotomy between worshipping an image of the Buddha and the understanding that he is not actually there, have, with good reason, been discussed in previous studies.²³⁷ By itself, the worship of an image may not be a criterion to ascertain the explicit belief that the Buddha is still present somewhere. The Buddhist practice called *buddhānusmṛti* aims at strengthening right mindfulness and instilling correct attitudes in a practitioner, as well as at inspiring him to follow the right path, i.e., the Buddhist path. By recalling and praising the wonderful appearance of the Buddha and his unsurpassable qualities, a practitioner may also seek to visualize the Buddha and so to say get reminded of, and related to, the positive effects of the Buddha's magnificence. At this point mysticism effectively comes into play, for example in the form of a timeless 'transfer of merit'.²³⁸ The Tathāgata's virtue or virtues are so great that their benefit is extended to others if only they commemorate these virtues.²³⁹ These ideas find confirmation in the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*,

236 See section 8.2.

237 For cross references, see CROSBY, 2005: 252.

238 For an overview of this topic from the stand-point of Hindu literature and religion, see HARA, 1994.

239 On the *Dharmacāitya Sūtra* and the commemoration of the Tathāgata's virtues, see section 9.2.5.

not merely in the spirit, but also in the letter. The transmitters of this collection may have felt a certain dichotomy between theory and practice, and may also have tried to bridge it the best they could.

In contrast to the teachings on the types of merits gained by means of the simplest forms of worship and devotion, that were, as suggested, certainly directed at the laity, the teachings found in the longest and most detailed early canonical *buddhānusmṛti* sūtra were most probably meant for the clergy, and the images mentioned therein might (only) refer to the visualization of a mental picture.²⁴⁰ The sūtra takes the form of a detailed meditation manual devoted to the ten *anusmṛtis*. Like a manual, it gives clear instructions, such as:

sit cross-legged [...] focus your thoughts in front [...] call to mind the Buddha [...] contemplate the image of the Tathāgata without taking your eyes off it [...] call to mind the qualities of the Tathāgata [...].²⁴¹

This sūtra taken on its own may not serve as a valid criterion to demonstrate ‘apotheosis’ or ‘transfer of merit’, but, such aspects are discussed in other sūtras of the same *Ekottarika-āgama*.

Teachings that take into account options for a potential laity, as well as their propensities, conform to early teachings, or at least try to do so. The sūtra on the five merits, for example, actually teaches four kinds of pious deeds, and is in fact dedicated to a broader audience, although it is seemingly addressed to the monks:

Therefore, monks, if there are good men and good women who wish to venerate the Buddha, they shall seek for expedient means [and] perfect these five merits.

This expression ‘good men and good women’ is obviously directed at lay / common people, and serves proselytizing purposes. There is no reason, other than conversion, to tell the monks the benefits or merits meant to attract the laity, regardless whether these words were or not uttered by the Buddha. Also, Ānanda who saved Vīrasena by telling him he had to practice the ten *anusmṛtis*,²⁴² would not need to be told by the Buddha what he just taught Vīrasena. The redundant insistence on the ten *anusmṛtis* and the fact that the

240 See section 9.2.1.

241 See section 9.2.1. for the entire text.

242 See section 9.1.5.

discourse does not include significant Buddhist teachings, indicates that in the first place it aimed at conversion.

Means of conversion and proselytism that emerged on the basis of certain ideational developments that came to be called *mahāyāna* are found in the *Maitreya-sūtra* of the *Ekottarika-āgama*. The text claims that offerings in combination with the recitation of the Buddha's name can lead to rebirth at the time of the future Buddha Maitreya. This passage is also highly interesting regarding other issues, which it mentions, so to say in the same breath:

Śākyamuni's followers are good at converting living beings, they worship all the relics, perform ceremonies and *dharma*-related worship, praising scriptures, writing them on silk and making offerings of these sūtras will lead to rebirth in Maitreya's time.

In the same line of thinking, offerings (of silk and other things) to the temples are also encouraged. One is further urged to worship all the Buddhas of the past too, to practice meditation, to adhere to the Buddha's teachings and to do things for the *saṃgha*. It is said that

those who undertake things for the *saṃgha*, and those who, with a focused heart, serve the three jewels, will for sure reach *nirvāṇa*.

Here we have a case of reverse transfer: the Buddhist followers are explicitly and repeatedly asked to do things for the clergy. But they are also encouraged to practice meditation. Neither the practice of meditation, nor the support of the *saṃgha*, contradict the idea that recalling the Buddha at the time of death, or at any time, can rescue a human from falling into hell or into any of the other two bad forms of existence: hungry ghosts or animals. On the contrary, the ancient compilers of this text, justifiably, considered these topics as categorically different issues.

The fact that Buddhism knows how to save the wicked while they are still alive may well have been one of its (selling) points, from early times on.²⁴³ Devadatta's rescue from hell adds but a pinch of post-mortem soteriology.²⁴⁴

243 See the source references for the accounts on Aṅgulimāla / Aṅgulimālaka in AKANUMA, 1967: 39–41; MALALASEKERA, 1997: 22–24. A large number of still extant texts narrate one or the other aspect of the life of the worst ever criminal, and how he turned into a devoted Buddhist monk. Certain texts even contain a protective formula supposedly taught by Aṅgulimāla to ease a woman's labour pains.

244 See section 8.4.

Devadatta attempted to kill the Buddha, a sheer unimaginable act of barbarism in the eyes of Buddhist clerics and laics alike. Notwithstanding this fact, the later Buddhist traditions found solutions for such a worst case scenario, speculating that indeed there is even a way out of hell. Buddha devotion must have seemed a good solution. What comes as a surprise is not so much the fact that Devadatta is somehow freed from his sins, but that this occurs in the context of an *Āgama* sūtra. The *Ekottarika-āgama* has several traces of an all-inclusive world-view that strives to attenuate the bad destinies of those who have committed very evil deeds. What is interesting for the key topic of this paper is the fact that Devadatta's even partial recitation of *namo buddhāya* bears the extremely positive result of enabling him to become a *pratyekabuddha* in the future. The Devadatta text in question ends with the Buddha's advice (aimed at a wider audience)

to submit oneself to the three treasures (the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṃgha*) with a respectful heart, to uphold the precepts and to watch one's bodily, oral and mental deeds.²⁴⁵

The three-fold commemoration or recollection (*anusmṛti*) of the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṃgha*, as mentioned in the *Flag Sūtra*,²⁴⁶ eventually came to be associated with a protective character, especially since it is coined on the three-fold creed or expression of faith in Buddhism. Faith is, in this case, directly related to and diverted towards the hope of rescue from threatening danger. Now, besides protection in times of war or salvation from a huge and dangerous fish, *buddhānusmṛti* can also ensure rescue from the imminent danger of women. This is, at least, what certain sūtras tell us. In the story of Vaṅgīsa, who feels strong erotic attraction for a woman (or for women in general), there is a discernable dichotomy between heaven and nirvāṇa, as two different ways of salvation for the clergy and the laity, a polarity that, based on the historical context of Buddhism, must have existed from its very beginnings. In the same breath Ānanda tells Vaṅgīsa:

Recall the Buddha [and you will] without avid desires surpass that lustful Nanda. Look at heaven and [imagine you could] end up in hell. Control your mind and you will get away from the five destinies.²⁴⁷

245 亦有恭敬之心向於三寶、亦復不奉持禁、不具足身口意行 (T2, no. 125, p. 806a).

246 See sections 4 and 9.1.4.

247 For the Vaṅgīsa story, see section 9.2.3.

In any case, the monk saves himself through Buddha commemoration and other kinds of mindfulness, and so does Vīrasena. The latter is rescued from falling into hell on the last day of his life by means of the ten commemorations, despite the fact that he had enjoyed himself nearly till the end.²⁴⁸ Also elsewhere in the *Ekottarika-āgama* it is said that by means of the ten commemorations one can

put an end to and separate oneself from: passionate love, physical love, non-physical love, from all [forms of] ignorance, from pride and arrogance, getting rid of them, and extinguishing them all.²⁴⁹

Now, despite the fact that the essential or ultimate (high-grade) soteriological aim of Buddhism consists in *nirvāṇa* and not in heaven, the latter does play an important role for the instruction and guidance (at least) of the laity. Its inclusion may have constituted a key factor for success. There are different sets of *dharma* that are said to lead to heaven, and a parallel Chinese version explicitly adds at the end that both, rebirth in hell, as well as in heaven, are provisional, should be thought of as something to be abandoned, and that one should strive to practice the ten teachings conducive to *nirvāṇa*.²⁵⁰

An interesting difference between the Pāli tradition and the *Ekottarika-āgama* can be seen in relation to the core practices recommended to overcome human suffering.²⁵¹ The *Ekottarika-āgama* sūtra views the ten remembrances as one of the most important practices, but the Pāli version does not share this view. Also according to the teaching given to the dying Anāthapiṇḍada, the ten *anusmṛti* are according to the *Ekottarika-āgama* the ten points (*dharma*) that lead to *nirvāṇa*, whereas the Pāli version only expounds the points that lead to hell, and those that lead to heaven. Only in the *Ekottarika-āgama* does Śāriputra exhort Anāthapiṇḍada to focus his mind on the Buddha. He closes his teaching by literally saying:

Sir, [that which] is known as the ‘practice of emptiness’²⁵² is the foremost *dharma* (point of teaching).²⁵³

248 See section 9.1.5.

249 See section 9.1.7.

250 See section 9.1.8.

251 On the *Mahāpañhā-sutta* see section 9.1.6.

252 *Kong xing* (空行).

253 See section 9.2.4.

If we exclude the supposition that the ‘practice of emptiness’ is but a cryptic Chinese translation of a *bodhipakṣika-dharma*, or of some kind of space-related meditation, the last admonition may be due to some kind of *prajñāparamitā* influence, albeit a modest one. A mere ‘practice of emptiness’ does not hint at a strong ideational evolution, but, like what was said above with regard to meditations,²⁵⁴ Buddhist followers may also have introduced other new practices. A large number of teachings and practices can, depending on their (re)interpretation, be reversed into their opposite.

Before the end of the fourth century C.E., the commentators of the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* explained, for example, that the other *anusmṛti* could also have the effect of appeasing fear, even if the Buddha did not mention them in the *Flag Sūtra*. In fact, the sūtra only advises to recall the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṃgha*, but the commentator’s argumentation is, in a sense, well founded, in contrast to more recent studies. An inspiring Japanese study tries to connect *buddhānusmṛti* to *dhāraṇī* from the perspective of a possibly common mnemonic plane.²⁵⁵ Although it is known that *dhāraṇī* started off its career as a mnemonic device, its semantic field was diversified in such a way that it soon turned into the generic name for protective formulas. In this regard, *dhāraṇī* displays a similar development as *buddhānusmṛti*, which also came to be used as a protective formula. The similitude is thus based on their potential function for protective purposes. The fact that in both cases the person who would like to benefit from these spells needs to have learned them by heart, is but a bow to the inevitable, due to their practical aim. Their resemblance is not by itself a plausible indication for a relation, but, instead, underlines that different kinds of formulas or lists, especially the abbreviated ones, bear the seminal potential to turn into ‘magic protective formulas’.

The repeated appearance of *buddhānusmṛti* within the *Ekottarika-āgama* collection points to the particular interest its compilers and transmitters had in the devotional aspect of Buddha commemoration. Among its hundreds of sūtras, over a dozen sūtras explicitly evoke ‘devotion to the Buddha’ and ways of praising the Buddha and his qualities. It has rightly been noted that this particular kind of devotion may also have served the purpose of emulation, setting the Buddha as an example. Regardless whether from the perspective of the later bodhisattva path (of *mahāyāna* conception) or from the perspective of earlier times, it is likely that the followers of Buddhism admired and venerated

254 BRONKHORST, 1998.

255 UJIKE, 1982.

the Buddha at all times and that by so doing, from the very start they longed for help and salvation, even though the written material related to his veneration presumably belongs to later stages. Even the *Traité* that is a commentary on an admittedly evolved Buddhist literature, says regarding homage and respect, that these are only due to the Buddha, who is like a king, not to the bodhisattvas who are but his captains.

Although the Chinese *Āgamas* contain several lists of *samādhis*, the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* is not found in any of them, nor, as far as I can see, is it contained in the Pāli *Nikāyas*. In contrast the commentator of the *Traité* who frequently cites from the early scriptures and rightly links the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* to the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, gives five reasons why the *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi* is strongly recommended and sums up his exposition by saying that it is more efficient than hundreds of other *samādhis*.²⁵⁶ Among the extant *Āgama* / *Nikāya* collections, it is the *Ekottarika-āgama* that is certainly the most enthusiast of *buddhānusmṛti*. Only half of the relevant passages have a Pāli parallel.

The concept of *buddhānusmṛti* is evidently linked to the idea of salvation. Clergy and laity alike can be rescued and saved through the commemoration or the recalling of the Buddha and of his physical and spiritual qualities. In this sense, *buddhānusmṛti* lies somewhere between ‘praise to the Buddha’, worship, surrender to a third-party protection, emulation, as well as meditation, or ‘pre-meditative practice’. For all that, only few things are truly innovative in early Buddhism.

Possible speculations whether commemoration of the Buddha was in the first place a means of salvation, or whether its first design was that the Buddha could / should serve as an inspiring model, may divert from the theme. An emulating aspiration is basically grounded on soteriological aspirations, especially since liberation is the prime goal in early Buddhist teachings. Also, whoever hopes for Buddhist salvation is supposed to follow the moral precepts in accordance with his Buddhist (cleric or lay) status. Even the salvation stories of the most wicked ones, are always told in a way that make it clear that the person concerned (Davaddatta, for example) never again fell back. Lay believers are commonly urged to follow the five lay precepts (no killing, no lying, no stealing, no adultery, no alcohol) and when they strive to act according to these rules, they do follow the Buddha’s example, as, according to the tradition, these rules were laid down by the Buddha himself. In the case of the *Ekottarika-*

256 See section 6.

āgama, the five lay precepts are repeatedly mentioned throughout the collection, in over twenty passages, which largely balances out the text passages devoted to Buddha commemoration.

In any case, before the end of the fourth century, *buddhānusmṛti* was one of the concepts privileged by the Indic transmitters of this particular *Ekottarika-āgama*. There is no doubt that – for them – it played a particularly important role. Each religious practice has its particular range of purposes. While later scriptures urge a believer to emulate the Buddha's example to the point of engaging in the bodhisattva path of *mahāyāna* conception, neither the *Ekottarika-āgama*, nor the other *Āgama* / *Nikāya* collections follow this line of thought, and the rare mentions of 'the bodhisattva path' refer to the eon long career or apprenticeship of Śākyamuni Buddha.

The inclusion of a full *Maitreya Sūtra* shows a certain effort to renew or redefine a Buddhist lay follower's soteriological options, and interestingly, the thematic format is coined in a similar way as in *mahāyāna* texts: Buddhist scriptures should be written and handed down, etc. Certainly, those who triggered this innovation did not see it as contrary to the other older teachings (found in the same collection). When, with the advent and diffusion of writing, certain (possibly *mahāyāna* oriented) Buddhists scriptures, propagated the position that writing Buddhist texts was meritorious, and that worshipping those sacred texts was also meritorious, this could not have been easily contradicted by what is said in the older sermons. On the contrary, the dissemination of Buddhist teachings seems to have had a crucial importance since its very beginning, and if the transmitters of the *Ekottarika-āgama* ever felt pressed to adapt to certain trends of their times, they may also refer to the diffusion of written scriptures and by so doing might not have intended to adhere to *mahāyāna* currents. As is known from the case of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, in the second half of the fourth century it had (still) been learned by heart, together with the *Madhyama-āgama*,²⁵⁷ by the same monk, who travelled the long distance from Central-Asian (possibly Tokhara / Tokharistan) to China without carrying any written material with him.

However, from later (undeniably *mahāyāna* oriented) scriptures we do understand that the 'cult of the book' becomes quantitatively meritocratic.²⁵⁸ Wherever movements such as 'the cult of the book', 'Buddha devotion (with and

257 The *Zhong a han jing* (中阿含經), T1, no. 26.

258 Any resemblance with certain *a priori* shifts in contemporary scientific procedures is purely coincidental.

without images)', 'worship of relics (*stūpa* cult)', 'apotheosis', and other new emerging soteriological currents constituted ubiquitously mainstream stances, or at least attractive new options, even those not adhering to the underlining ideational changes of these currents needed to take action and adapt to the situation as best they could by refutation, adaptation, restoration, etc. The fact that orthodoxy (too) persists by means of development and reinterpretation is in fact one of its most peculiar features.

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